



New Orleans
CIY BUSINESS

2009 HEALTH CARE HEROES

SPONSORED BY:



**40% of us will develop cancer.
Wouldn't you like to know where you stand?**

Today, Ochsner not only treats more cancer patients than anyone else in Louisiana – we're helping more people prevent it as well. Introducing the new Cancer Screening Clinic at Ochsner Medical Center in New Orleans. Here, we help you know where you stand with cancer by evaluating genetic and hereditary factors that can predict your risk and by performing skin cancer screenings, biopsies and more.



➔ ochsner.org/cancerscreening

For a **Free Cancer Risk Assessment**, go online or call **866-431-8212** for an appointment today. A few minutes of prevention could be worth a lifetime of cure.

Every**here** you need us.™

© 2009 Ochsner Health System (ochsner.org) is a non-profit, academic, multi-specialty, healthcare delivery system dedicated to patient care, research and education.

New Orleans
CITYBUSINESS
2009
HEALTH CARE
HEROES

s p o n s o r e d b y :



Mercedes-Benz
Mercedes-Benz of New Orleans



MERCEDES-BENZ OF NEW ORLEANS
3727 VETERANS MEMORIAL BLVD., METAIRIE, LA (504) 456-3727

Introducing the all-new GLK.

On the street, it is more compact than the average SUV. But as it fills your rearview mirror in the passing lane, there's nothing small about it. With its self-adjusting sport suspension, the GLK plants its 19" tires firmly on any surface. A traction-control system that monitors wheel slip 6,000 times a minute helps make it impervious to most any weather condition. And its interior delivers the utmost in technology, including an available Multimedia Package with a 600-watt multichannel surround-sound system. The all-new GLK. Great engineering is great engineering at any size. **MBUSA.com**

We salute those who find it in their hearts to help others.



The most important things in life – spending time with family and friends, building communities, and helping others – all begin with enjoying good health. At UnitedHealthcare, we're committed to helping health care professionals provide the best quality preventive and clinical care to their patients.

We're pleased to recognize the 50 outstanding men and women selected as the **CityBusiness 2009 Health Care Heroes**.



unitedhealthcare.com

Inside:

Introduction6
 Past honorees7
 Health Care Heroes
 event photos39

Animal care

Karen Miller Becnel8
 Chris Fabacher8

First responders

Dan Russo, Dax Russo,
 Jason Russo10
 Linda Thompson11

Nurses

Diane Abbondante13
 Elizabeth Buras13
 Rosa Bustamante-Forest15
 Cheryl Carter15
 Darlene Gondrella16
 Donna Guzman16
 Kim Haley17
 Paula Harrelson17

Dianna Lauve18
 Kathy Steiner18
 Mark Stockstill19

Physicians

Glenn Casey20
 Pui Chun (Joan) Cheng21
 Michele Cooper21
 Frank DellaCroce and
 Scott Sullivan22
 Joseph Epps22
 Sander Florman23
 Ana Hands23
 Timothy Harlan24
 Peter Hertzak24
 William Johnston25
 Leslie Levenson25
 Steve Levine26
 Sam Lucas, Dennis Mello,
 Chris Snyder26
 Robert Post27
 Erich Richter27
 Carlos Rodriguez-Fierro28

Hector Ventura28

Professionals

Stephen Baldwin29
 Matthew Curole30
 Richard Gaiennie30
 Robert Gardner31
 Thomas Grimstad31
 Geoffrey Nagle32
 Melba Perez-Berguno32
 Mackie Shilstone33
 Diane Sieta33
 Lillian Stiegler34
 Debra Thibodeaux34
 Steve Worley35

Volunteers

Viola Cochran36
 Christine Dittmann36
 Betty Dugas37
 Joseph Heintz37
 Walter Melan38
 Mattie Schouest38

2009

New Orleans
CITYBUSINESS

Health Care Heroes



Published by the NOPG LLC
 111 Veterans Memorial Blvd.,
 Suite 1440, Metairie, La. 70005
 504-834-9292; Fax: 504-837-2258.

Publisher and president: D. Mark Singletary
Associate Publisher: Lisa Blossman
Managing Editor: Greg LaRose
News Editor: Christian Moises
Associate Editor: Autumn C. Giusti
Art Director: Alex Borges
Account Executives: Liz Baldini, Jeanne Farrell,
 Cassie Foreman, Ginger Graf, Coco Evans Judd
Production Manager: Julie Bernard



GOOD NEWS IS WORTH REPEATING!

Framed Article

Articles are reformatted to fit on either one or two pages with "As seen in CityBusiness" on the top of the page. Article size is 8 1/2" x 11".

Framed articles take approximately 1 month to complete

Digital Reprint

CityBusiness will reformat the article or list with "As seen in CityBusiness" on the top of the page and send it to you in PDF format. Total Cost: \$500

Contact Monique Brignac
 (504) 293-9724 • email: moique.brignac@nopg.com





Putting ALL the pieces together...

Quality patient care begins the minute you pull up to our door.

Quality patient care is made up of many pieces – the valet who greets you in the driveway, the person who admits you with a smile, the housekeeper who cleans your room, the nurse who takes your blood pressure, the doctor who listens to your heart. At Tulane Medical Center, we don't just practice medicine, we shape your entire healthcare experience. Congratulations to our diverse group of 2009 Health Care Heroes, each of whom plays a vital role in creating the best quality patient care experience for every person who arrives at our door.

Tulane Medical Center Health Care Heroes

Stephen Baldwin
Vice President of Operations

Sander Florman, MD
Director of Abdominal Transplant

Timothy Harlan, MD
Medical Director of Outpatient Clinics

Kathy Steiner, RN
Director of Adult Care Services

*It's not just medicine,
it's TULANE medicine.*

www.tulanehealthcare.com

Tulane
Medical Center

504-988-5800

1415 Tulane Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70112

Introduction

Health Care Heroes honors heartbeat of New Orleans



Christian Moises
News Editor

Life or death.

That's pretty much the order of the day for most of the 2009 Health Care Heroes.

And while they often face grueling, heart-breaking situations, it's caring for people that motivates them.

The 55 honorees who make up the third annual Health Care Heroes class have proved their commitment to the region based on their professional accomplishments and perseverance. As always, choosing finalists posed a big challenge for the selection panel, as the stories, accomplishments and contributions to the health care community make every nominee so deserving.

In the program's third year, honorees discuss their most challenging, memorable, difficult or rewarding experience, and the stories are powerful. Many honorees selected this year have pulled from personal experience to relate with and help care for their patients.

Countless others have gone beyond their clinics, hospitals and offices to immerse themselves in surrounding communities, in the process providing care to the city's less fortunate and foreign language populations.

Divided among six categories — animal care, first responders, nursing, physicians, professionals and volunteers — our honorees are quite literally the region's life support.

This year's two animal care heroes show their commitment to patients that cannot defend themselves or communicate when they need help.

The four first responders — three from the same family — represent the best of health care's front line, including emergency medical technicians, paramedics and police.

Eleven nurses are honored this year for providing care in the face of adversity, serving as models of professionalism to their peers.

The 20 physicians selected this year offer expertise to a struggling local health care industry. Despite increased patient loads, more serious health issues and budget crunches, these doctors routinely show their dedication.

The 12 health care professionals honored this year have contributed to returning a high standard of health care to the region. Their responsibilities range from financial work and creating hospital menus to training some of the world's top athletes.

This year's six volunteer honorees have devoted their time and specialized skills as non-payroll aides to help patients and clinic visitors feel comfortable.

CityBusiness thanks each of them for their tireless effort and the difference they are making in the welfare of the community.

Congratulations to the Health Care Heroes Class of 2009. •

News Editor Christian Moises can be reached at 293-9249 or by e-mail at christian.moises@nojg.com.

Health Care Heroes

Past honorees

2008

ANIMAL CARE

Robin Beaulieu
Joe Dalgo
Kelly Kreider
Giselle Moises
Liz Saylor

FIRST RESPONDERS

Briana Briscoe
Ryan Brown
Jullette Saussy
Cecile Tebo
Chris Wilt

NURSING

Lillian Agnelly
Sheri Berger
Shane Brossette
Bryan Dean
Anthony DiGerolamo
Kerry Jeanice
Brian Mahl
Joan Rooney

Debbie Schmidt
Stella Wright

PHYSICIANS

Milton Anderson
Nicolas Bazan
Lisa Bazzett
Daniel Bouchette
Bryan Bertucci
Michael Brothers
Charles Brown
Randall Brown
Jocelyn Tinsley Greely
Emile LaBranche
Gabriel Lasala
Robert Matheney
Norman McSwain
Thanh Nguyen
Ebony Price
Elmore Rigamer
Ken Roy
Alfred Robichaux
Milton Seiler

Jim Smith
Keith Van Meter
Mark Workman

PROFESSIONALS

Bonnie Arton
Redfield Bryan
John Celments
James Doty
Bill Fox
Robert Hawley
John Lemoine
Barbara Moffett
Mark Peters
Dwayne Thomas

VOLUNTEERS

Elsie Olivier
Philip Olivier
Theresa Trosclair
Jessie Williams

2007

ANIMAL CARE

Andrew Gutter
James Riopelle

FIRST RESPONDERS

Steven Brown
Michael Guillot

NURSING

Patricia Berryhill
Lorris Bouzigard
Jan Hebert
Ann Kallauner
Alice Craft Kerney
Patrice Kimball
Anna Kokes
Mary MacGregor
Evelyn Randolph
Wayne Rau
Lena Riordan
Joan Rooney
Jennifer Steel
Sally Tusa
Nathalie Walker
Cynthia Warren
Ray Yakelis

PHYSICIANS

Stephen Bardot
Lionel Bourgeois
Roland Bourgeois
Jay Brooks
Gerald Cohen
Joseph Crapanzano Jr.
Frank Culicchia
Karen DeSalvo
Raja Dhurandhar
Sander Florman
Juan Gershanik
Joseph Guarisco
Vicky Hebert
Kevin Jordan
Ronald Liuzza
Kevin Martinez
Richard Meyer
Paul Nathan
Steven Ross
Swati Shah
Charles Thomas
Najeeb Thomas
Gerald Vocke

PROFESSIONALS

James Spencer Campbell
Bruce Clement
D. Scott Crabtree
Virginia Davis
Les Hirsch
Lynn Hobbs-Green
Sarah Hoffpauir
Larry Hollier
Corey Marvel
William Pinsky
Patrick Quinlan
Warner Thomas
Basil Thoppil
Lynn Witherspoon
Richard Zuschlag

VOLUNTEERS

Cheron Brylski
John DeCamp
David Diaz
Barbara Hyland
Curtis Jacob
Lester Johnson
Salvador Paz
Rudy Sampey
Shirley Tuero



HERTZAK LASER CENTER

LAZER LIPO

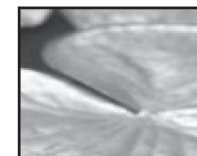
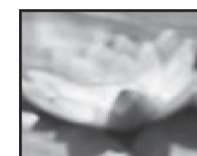
Lazer Lipo is a revolutionary and minimally invasive procedure for the removal of fat and the sculpting of body contours. It is designed specifically for skin tightening and targets those hard to tone areas. Lazer Lipo requires only a local anesthetic and involves minimal downtime for recovery.

For over 30 years, Dr. Hertzak has helped patients achieve their goals by offering the newest innovations and techniques in surgical, non-surgical and minimally invasive procedures.

Look How You Feel!

www.hertzaklaser.com

504-522-4888



Don't Trade It. Donate It.

CARS • TRUCKS • BOATS



IS YOUR JUNKER A CLUNKER? By donating your old car, truck or boat to Bridge House today, you get a possible tax deduction. The money we raise reselling your donated vehicle helps pay for substance abuse treatment for about 500 people in our community every year.

**FREE TOWING &
SAME DAY PICK-UP**
504.598.3355
www.bridgehouse.org



Building a Bridge to the Future.

We're building a new, larger, permanent facility at the corner of S. Dupre and Earhardt Boulevard. Our goal is to increase the quality and availability of treatment in our community. To help with our expansion fund call 522.2124 ext. 14 for information.

ANIMAL CARE

Karen Miller Becnel

Position: owner, The Cat Hospital of Metairie

Age: 60

Family: husband, Tim; stepchildren, Chris, 32, Lauren, 28; 15 cats between her home and clinic

Education: bachelor's degree in veterinary science and doctor of veterinary medicine, Texas A&M University

Like many veterinarians rescuing and caring for animals immediately after Hurricane Katrina, Dr. Karen Miller Becnel was greatly affected by the severity of conditions in which animals were left behind.

She and The Cat Hospital staff picked up animals trapped inside homes and wandering the streets and transported them back to safety, nursing, feeding, hydrating and giving them medications to help them stay alive.

"There was this one cat who was trapped for eight weeks in a home and was brought to us. This cat had such a little spark left, but he made it and we helped it survive," Miller Becnel said. "The whole situation made me realize that you should never give up and also how tough animals are, and as long as it is the right situation to save them and prolong their lives, you have to try what you can."

Miller Becnel received a certificate of appreciation from Alley Cat Allies for her rescue and health care work after Katrina.

"The conditions were so severe, and so many animals needed help. It was unlike anything I had ever seen in my 30 years of practice."

Miller Becnel began as a veterinarian in 1973 when she opened the East Gently Veterinary Hospital. She also opened Crowder Animal Hospital in 1980 and The Cat Hospital of Metairie 10 years later. In 1998, she sold Crowder Animal Hospital and concentrated on just felines.

"I have a special affinity and love for all animals, but a special affinity for cats," said Miller Becnel, who owns 15 cats between her home and clinic. "They're my favorite animals."

The 60-year-old said the most interesting thing about her practice over the years has been how much people have grown attached to their pets, and the reward, she said, "never gets old when I can bring their pets back to them happy and healthy."•

— Tommy Santora



photo by Frank Aymami

ANIMAL CARE

Chris Fabacher

Position: veterinarian and owner, Metairie Small Animal Hospital

Age: 55

Family: wife, Pat; daughters, Courtney, 26, Megan, 24

Education: bachelor's degree in animal science, Louisiana State University; doctor of veterinary medicine, LSU School of Veterinary Medicine

Dr. Chris Fabacher began his career as a young kid who always had an intense interest in a wide variety of pets.

"I've always enjoyed taking care of animals," Fabacher said. "I've had snakes, rats, turtles, cats and dogs and loved them all."

That interest earned Fabacher a summer job at the hospital that eventually become home to his veterinary practice.

"I spent my summers working closely with Dr. (Tom) Melius at Metairie Small Animal Hospital," Fabacher said. "I was impressed with the work he was doing and grew to love treating animals and helping them get better."

Although he sees the rewards of his job fairly regularly, Fabacher said nothing was nearly as rewarding as the work he did in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when he used his personal boat to rescue people and animals throughout Old Metairie.

"I parked it at the hospital parking lot before the storm to get it out of the water, but it became

a very valuable tool in the days after the storm passed," Fabacher said. "I became a link between our clients and the animals they may have left behind. I was able to get animals out of homes and bring them to the hospital where they could have food, water and shelter."

In addition to taking care of animals, Fabacher also opened the hospital to other responders in the area rescuing people and animals.

Fabacher said much has changed in the almost 20 years he has been practicing veterinary medicine. He said improved equipment has made his job a tad less dirty and maybe a little easier, but treatment costs have become a challenge.

"It is a big problem, especially in today's economy. It's not like human medicine, where insurance can help. It is hard to see clients have to decide what to do with an animal that has become a part of a family."•

— Robin Shannon



photo by Frank Aymami

New Orleans
CITY BUSINESS
2009
HEALTH CARE
HEROES

s p o n s o r e d b y :

Ketel One[®]
VODKA



**THE GLAZER'S COMPANIES OF LOUISIANA IS THE PROUD
DISTRIBUTOR FOR KETEL ONE VODKA IN LOUISIANA!**

The Nolet family has distilled Ketel One Vodka for over 300 years at the Nolet Distillery in Schiedam, Holland. Ketel One Vodka is distilled from 100% wheat in alembic copper pot stills, filtered over loose charcoal, and rests in tile lined tanks until ready. Ketel One Vodka is consistently named one of the world's top spirits for quality and taste. Ketel One Vodka is named after the original, copper pot still, "Distilleerketel #1," and is handcrafted in small batches. The alcohol content of this spirit is 80 proof.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Dan Russo

Position: deputy chief, Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office
Age: 60
Family: wife, Frances; children, Dax, 32, Jason, 30
Education: bachelor's degree in criminal justice, Loyola University

Dax Russo

Position: robbery sergeant, Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office
Age: 33
Family: wife, Melissa; children, Dax Jr., 21 months
Education: Rummel High School alumnus

Jason Russo

Position: enforcement sergeant, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Age: 30
Family: wife, Jennifer; children, Jace, 4, Jonathan, 1
Education: Rummel High School alumnus

From left:
Dax, Dan and
Jason Russo.



Photo courtesy Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office

In tragedies big and small, Dan Russo has played a vital role. Now his two sons, Dax and Jason, are following in the tradition.

"When you are a patrol officer, you are the first one on the scene," Dan said. "We get there before the fire department, we get there before anybody. And a lot of times you are in a situation where you have to take action immediately."

Working as a recovery team commander at the 1982 Pan-Am crash site in Kenner, Dan performed the grim task of retrieving bodies.

"My team alone picked up 71 bodies. That's something that is hard to forget."

Dan's dedication prompted his son, Dax, to follow him into law enforcement. First working on patrol, then gang enforcement and now the robbery division with the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office, Dax has also served as an emergency first responder.

"During a hurricane, for example, everybody becomes activated. The whole department goes to a 12-hour shift.

We basically back up the patrol divisions and whatever goes on, whether it's an accident or trying to get someone to shelter, we are ready to pitch in," Dax said.

A former Marine Corps Reserves sergeant, Dax remembers watching his father help accident victims.

"A lot of times we were in a car and he stopped because of an accident," Dax said. "And now I do it and my son is experiencing the same thing."

Dan's example also has inspired his youngest son, Jason.

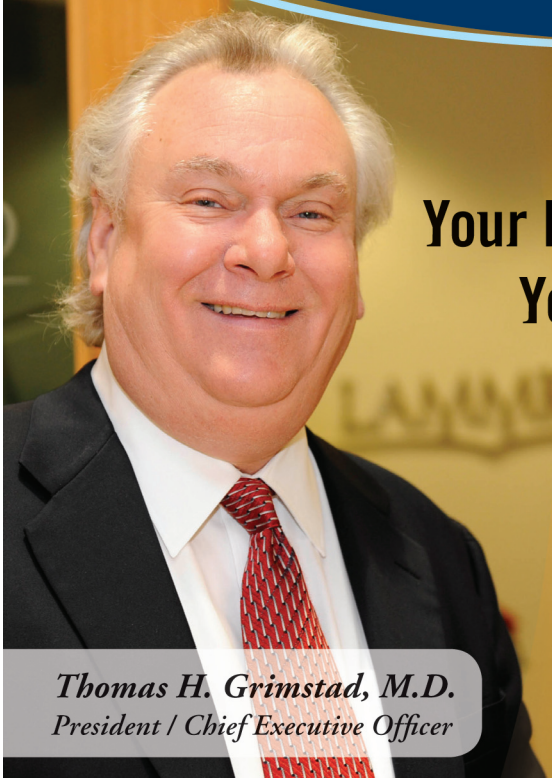
An enforcement agent with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Jason, in a hurricane, serves on the front line of search and rescue operations.

"Any time a hurricane has entered the Gulf, our department has mobilized and been prepared to move people to Baton Rouge," Jason said.

During Katrina, he helped move residents out of a Metairie nursing home and later conducted search and rescue operations in the Lower 9th Ward. •

— Garry Boulard

Congratulations to a **LAMMICO**
Health Care Hero



**Your Partner.
Your Advocate.**


Louisiana's largest medical professional liability insurance company is committed to attracting and retaining physicians to become the next "Health Care Hero."

Thomas H. Grimstad, M.D.
President / Chief Executive Officer


504/831.3756 www.lammico.com 800/452.2120

2009 CITYBUSINESS HEALTHCARE HERO

**CONGRATULATIONS TO
GEOFF NAGLE, PHD MSW**



- American Academy of Pediatrics, Charles M Vanchiere Child Advocacy Award
- DHH Commissioner's Award for Child Abuse Prevention
- Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana - Champion for Children



Tulane University
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Psychiatry and Neurology



photo by Frank Aymami

FIRST RESPONDER

Linda Thompson

Position: emergency medical services supervisor, East Jefferson General Hospital

Age: 56

Family: husband Richard Barham; children, Rachel, 34, Richard, 30

Education: paramedic certificate, Nunez Community College

Linda Thompson was just a couple of credit hours short of her bachelor's degree in nursing when she took a course in emergency medical services that changed her career plans.

The paramedic profession, a relatively new career choice when compared with centuries-old nursing, better suited Thompson's personality, which she describes as type-A, achievement-driven.

She enjoys the responsibility, independence and immediate satisfaction that comes with being a first responder.

"You work better under stress than not," Thompson said of those drawn to the profession. "You have to make snap decisions and stand by them."

She finds the result rewarding.

"Just to see that you make a difference. You can have someone going from near death to dying and have them recover. It's up to you."

She recalled an experience early in her career when the first paramedics on the scene were unable to resuscitate a 76-year-

old suffering from cardiac arrest. Thompson arrived with the second unit and resuscitated the patient en route to the hospital.

"He gave up and it's like, we didn't," Thompson said. "At 76, you still have a lot of life left."

The patient lived another six years. His grandson, a volunteer fireman who rode in the ambulance with Thompson at the time, is now a psychiatrist.

"It's the ripple effect of saving someone; so many people are affected," said Thompson, who typically spends just 20 minutes or so with the families of those she treats.

She supervises paramedics in her current position, building their confidence and making sure the emergency medical services unit runs smoothly as some 90 patients come through the center daily.

Thompson also recruits and mentors others through East Jefferson General Hospital's partnership with Delgado Community College, addressing a paramedic shortage. •

— Diana Chandler

**WHY ARE WE
HERE?**
BECAUSE TODAY'S
NEW ORLEANS
NEEDS
TOMORROW'S
BEST HEALTH CARE.

**AT TOURO,
WE'RE NOT
WAITING FOR
TOMORROW.**



Touro Infirmary congratulates the 2009 CityBusiness Health Care Heroes. Thank you to all of our employees, physicians and volunteers for continuing our 156-year legacy of service. Touro is proud to lead the way to tomorrow's health care.

**JOAN CHENG, M.D.
MICHELE COOPER, M.D.
CHRISTINE DITTMANN**

**ROBERT GARDNER, Ph.D.
KIM HALEY, RN
PAULA HARRELSON, RN**

**DIANNA LAUVE
WALTER MELAN**

JOIN THE TOURO TEAM.

**CALL 504-897-7011
OR VISIT WWW.TOURO.COM.**



Like Any Great Family

*HEROES are part
of our HISTORY.*



Carlos Rodriguez-Fierro, MD
Cardiologist



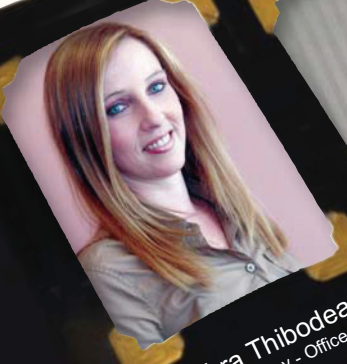
Leslie Levenson, MD
Cardiologist



Erich Richter, MD
Neurosurgeon



Darlene Gondrella, RN
Case Management - Senior Director



Debra Thibodeaux
Radiation Therapy - Office Manager



Diane Sieta
Case Management
Reimbursement Supervisor



Betty Dugas
Hospital Volunteer - WJMC Auxiliary



Mattie Schouest
Hospital Volunteer
WJMC Auxiliary

**WEST
JEFFERSON
MEDICAL CENTER** has
a long, proud history of enlisting
everyday heroes who dedicate their lives
to helping others. We have been serving families in
our community for nearly 50 years, and today we wish to
thank our **2009 HEALTH CARE HEROES** – as
well as every unsung hero in our hospital family – for their unwavering
commitment to keeping our community healthy.

Our Family Caring For Your Family™



www.wjmc.org



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

NURSE

Diane Abbondante

Position: surgical services director, River Parishes Hospital

Age: 52

Family: husband, Richard; daughters, Lisa, 26, Kristen, 24

Education: bachelor's degree in nursing, Seton Hall University

Although she retired from her nursing career at River Parishes Hospital in LaPlace in March, Diane Abbondante continues to use her medical knowledge to care for her elderly parents and uncle.

"I have a heart for the elderly," said Abbondante, who spent most of her career caring for patients with multiple traumas and gunshot wounds.

When she was young, Abbondante's ill grandmother lived with her family.

"I really wanted to be able to help her," she said. "I got to witness how the nurses helped her."

Abbondante went on to earn her bachelor's degree in nursing from Seton Hall University. In 1982, she moved to New Orleans, where she raised a family with her husband, Richard, and worked as a nurse for River Parishes Hospital for the past 30 years.

She was certified in perioperative nursing, working for 15 years with surgery patients. At retirement, she was director of surgical services River Parishes Hospital, managing operating rooms, the post-anesthesia care unit, the central sterile department, endoscopic suites and the ambulatory surgery unit.

"My greatest accomplishment was to have all of my nurses certified in their specialties," said Abbondante, whose staff had the lowest turnover rate at the hospital. "Almost everybody who was eligible to be certified was certified."

She is proud to watch young nurses in her field develop professionally and personally. And although she is passionate about caring for the elderly, Abbondante is looking forward to also helping to care for her first grandchild due in September. •

— Amy Ferrara Smith

NURSE

Elizabeth Buras

Position: registered nurse, Slidell Memorial Hospital

Age: 30

Family: husband, Gene; son, Beau, 3

Education: licensed practicing nurse program, Delgado Community College; bachelor's degree in nursing, Louisiana State University; pursuing master's degree in nursing, Southeastern Louisiana University

Elizabeth Buras missed out on the challenges that came with Hurricane Katrina but did have to stare down a few hurdles when Hurricane Ivan tore through the Gulf Coast in September 2004.

Buras was working as a nurse in the intensive care unit at Chalmette Medical Center when the call came down that the hospital needed to be evacuated as soon as possible.

"We had to fly our ICU patients by helicopter from Chalmette to Baton Rouge and eventually to Lake Charles," Buras said. "Each nurse at the hospital was responsible for one critically ill patient. I found the whole experience extremely exciting."

Still, Buras said the trip was not without its mishaps. As the helicopter was leaving Baton Rouge for Lake Charles, Buras said the pilot left the gas cap off the fuel tank.

"We get into the air and we all of a sudden smelled gasoline in the cabin," Buras said. "He had to land the chopper and start again. It was pretty tense."

Although the work after Ivan hasn't quite been as exciting,



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Elizabeth Buras, left, discusses a patient with Slidell Memorial Hospital nurse Brenda Jackson.

Buras said she couldn't see herself doing anything other than nursing. She said she once intended to go to medical school, but "taking the long way" gave her a new appreciation for being a registered nurse.

"I get great satisfaction out of helping people. I love the constant patient interaction that I get every day. I like talking with families and teaching patients and family

members about illness and what to do to treat and prevent them."

Buras said she appreciates the close-knit, family atmosphere at Slidell Memorial Hospital, which took her in after Katrina. She said she hopes to eventually move on to a small outpatient clinic she can call her own. •

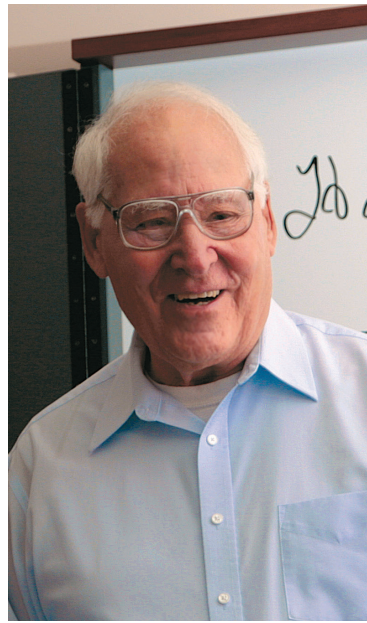
— Robin Shannon



MACKIE SHILSTONE
Inspires people to achieve their goals through innovative personal life coaching and expert fitness training.



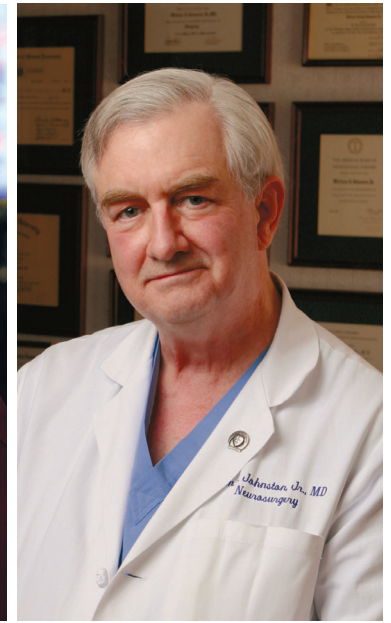
LINDA THOMPSON, EMT
Serves as the front line of care for our community.



FRITZ HEINZ
Through volunteering, he exemplifies selflessness.



CHERYL CARTER, RN
Delivers compassionate care in the sometimes chaotic world of the Emergency Department



WILLIAM JOHNSTON, M.D.
As a neurosurgeon, he helps patients regain their quality of life.

today...

**We celebrate five distinct lives
built around ONE COMMON THEME—**

service.

While they have each chosen their own path, these five individuals represent what is best, not only in healthcare, but in every aspect of life. They have dedicated their lives to the service of others.

Yes, we congratulate them. More importantly, we thank them for helping build a culture of caring that our community has come to expect.



East Jefferson General Hospital

www.ejgh.org

Handwritten notes on a whiteboard, including 'Cayla', 'ranney', 'HC 5', 'Resp E', 'Lab', 'Pblu', and 'Sta 0208'.

NURSE

Rosa Bustamante-Forest

Position: program director and nurse manager, March of Dimes, Daughters of Charity Services of New Orleans

Age: 55

Family: husband, Larry; children, Geoffrey, 32, Lauren, 29, Rafael, 23
Education: bachelor's degree in nursing, Vanderbilt University; master's degree in public health, Tulane University; master's degree in nursing, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing

Norma's story resembled that of 90 percent of the low-income migrant and mostly Hispanic expectant mothers Rosa Bustamante-Forest has treated during the past two years on the mobile health unit she directs.

"I was just there for her," Bustamante-Forest said. "As soon as I met Norma, I knew I'd done the right thing."

Bustamante-Forest is referring to having left a 25-year career in academia to return to patient care. She started in the nursing field 34 years ago in a hospital maternity ward.

Norma, a pseudonym, was pregnant, suffering from a history of child abuse, incest and rape, and worried about the health of the two young daughters she'd left behind in El Salvador with her mother. Norma worked in New Orleans, sending what little money she could to her mother, daughters



Rosa Bustamante-Forest offers health advice to patient Santos Martinez at the March of Dimes Mom and Baby Mobile Health Center.

and six younger siblings at home.

"Emotionally and spiritually, she was broken," Bustamante-Forest said of Norma. "Her physical aches and pains were really a manifestation of her broken spirit and emotional pain."

A native El Salvadoran herself, Bustamante-Forest spoke Norma's language and understood the struggles growing up impoverished in the Central American country, although their childhoods were different.

Norma gave birth to a healthy child, but her stresses continued through unemployment and having to sleep on a garage floor with her husband and newborn.

Bustamante-Forest gives kudos to her three-member crew, including Shannon Psingstag, nurse-midwife, Lillie Acezedo the medical assistant and office manager, and health promoter Collyng Salinas, who, along with the obstetrics-gynecology unit at Louisiana State University Medical Center, gave Norma all the help she needed.

As Norma rebounded, she proudly told Bustamante-Forest of the flea market booth she was able to rent on the West Bank, selling odds and ends.

"Without us," Bustamante-Forest said, "I think Norma probably would not have received care."•

— Diana Chandler



NURSE

Cheryl Carter

Position: emergency department director, East Jefferson General Hospital

Age: 54

Family: husband, David; children, Brad Vandevender, 35, Dana Kelley, 28, Brandon Kelley, 26
Education: associate's degree in nursing, Gulf Coast Community College; bachelor's degree in health arts, St. Francis University

As director of East Jefferson General Hospital's emergency department, Cheryl Carter sees up close the traumas and triumphs of life — and she likes it that way.

"This is an area of the hospital that has quick rewards and quick turnarounds," said Carter, who has been with EIGH since the early 1990s. "Someone may come in who is at death's door, and the next day you see that that person survived and realize it is most likely because of the things that were done by our team in this department."

Overseeing a staff of about 80, Carter has played a crucial role in developing the hospital's psychiatric emergency department.

"We partnered with our psych unit and now actually have psych nurses who live in the emergency department," Carter said. "They are able to interview patients and start therapeutic interactions and, because of their perspective and training, have a lot of resources at their fingertips that the emergency nurses may not have."

That perspective means that an emergency room patient who may have more challenges

than just physical problems is treated at many levels, Carter said.

Because Carter has emerged as a mentor to her fellow nurses as well as an expert who keeps up with regulatory issues, she has frequently been thrust into leadership positions, most recently serving as chairwoman for the Emergency Nurses Association's local chapter.

Last summer, Carter led an outreach program for two hospitals in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, as floods were ravaging the region.

"The idea was to present ourselves as living testimony to the fact you can be hit by a huge flood and still live," Carter said, referring to the work she and members of her staff at EIGH did for some 12 straight days after Katrina hit New Orleans.

Bringing with them care packages full of New Orleans food, Carter governed the team with a guiding principle.

"When you are involved in the huge job of cleaning up after a flood, just having one meal you don't have to cook is a big plus."•

— Garry Boulard



photo by Frank Aymami

NURSE

Darlene Gondrella

Position: case management and patient access services senior director, West Jefferson Medical Center

Age: 39

Family: husband, Randy; son, Randall, 9

Education: bachelor's degree in nursing, Louisiana State University School of Nursing

For Darlene Gondrella, the threats of hurricanes Katrina and Gustav put her 17-year nursing career to the test.

"Hurricane Katrina was very challenging in that here I was at the hospital, and my family was off evacuating," said Gondrella, who remained at the hospital for nearly two weeks after Katrina. "We had no power for three days, no water and no air-conditioning. It was a very challenging environment."

Three years later, as a member of West Jefferson Medical Center's leadership team, Gondrella helped to evacuate patients for Gustav, when forecasters predicted the West Bank would take a direct hit. In just a few hours, Gondrella and her team of three employees arranged for patient transport as well as the organization of relevant documents, copies of medical records, medica-

tions, treatment supplies and personal items.

She went without sleep for 46 hours to comfort patients and their families and to ensure the safety of the hospital and the staff who remained in the building.

"I learned that I'm capable of doing things that I didn't know I was capable of doing," Gondrella said. "We had to oversee and manage the evacuation of the number of patients who we evacuated."

Gondrella said her team evacuated at least 70 dialysis patients in about two hours. When it was time for patients to return to the hospital, Gondrella's team also organized their arrival.

"To me, it's a rewarding experience to be there as a patient advocate. Whatever their needs are, we take care of it."•

— Amy Ferrara Smith

NURSE

Donna Guzman

Position: registered nurse in the medical intensive care unit, Slidell Memorial Hospital

Age: 46

Family: husband, Javier; daughters, Meli, 28, Letti, 27, Holly, 25, Vicky, 23

Education: associate's degree in nursing, Pearl River Community College

Donna Guzman calls nursing her second career. Her first career was raising four daughters.

"When they all got old enough, I said to myself I am ready to do something that I could be proud of and my family could be proud of, and that door opened up to nursing school," Guzman said. "I have fallen in love with it. I like spending time with patients. They all have different stories. And every day, you just try to make a difference that does good for the patient."

Guzman has been a registered nurse for more than 15 years, with 11 years spent at Slidell Memorial Hospital and seven years in its medical intensive care unit.

"It's a little more intense than the other departments and you have to react quicker and faster than normal," Guzman said. "I actually used to think it was the department behind closed doors for the elite and special nurses, like the wizard behind the

curtains. But since being here, I have really blended in and become accustomed to the fast and critical pace."

Guzman said her nursing career was first impacted during her orientation at St. Tammany Parish Hospital. One of her first jobs was to help care for a 40-year-old Down syndrome patient who was very sick when she was admitted.

"She was lethargic, unconscious and just not doing well. All I remember is notifying the nurses as things kept getting worse, and they all rushed in and out of the room to keep trying to save her, but she ended up dying," Guzman said.

"I was a young nurse at the time and didn't know as much as I should have, still learning on the fly. It made me work harder early in my career to give everything I could to study this profession and be the nurse I am today."•

— Tommy Santora



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Donna Guzman administers medicine to patient Catherine Long.

NURSE

Kim Haley

Position: registered nurse, Crescent City Physicians Inc. at Touro Infirmary

Age: 36

Family: husband, Ron; children, Emma, 10, Ally, 8, Zachary, 4

Education: bachelor's degree in nursing, Louisiana State University — New Orleans

Helping female cancer patients moves Kim Haley beyond focusing on their hardships to appreciating their strengths as overcomers.

"It teaches me never to give up and to always to have hope," said Haley, who began her career 14 years ago as an inpatient oncology nurse. She has worked with Touro gynecologic oncologist Dr. Joan Cheng, arranging outpatient care for the past seven years.

Haley coordinates Cheng's patient load, assessing patient needs and coordinating treatment and follow-up care. She encounters women of all ages and socioeconomic levels who impress her with their ability to balance family, work, treatment and dreams without dropping the ball.

"They juggle all of these entities along with being a patient and a cancer survivor," said Haley, remembering one patient with whom she's developed a friendship over recent years. The patient did everything right, taking excellent preventative care of herself, Haley said, but still developed a gynecologic cancer.

"When I see everything that she does and recall everything that she's been through, it's just inspirational," Haley said. "She



Registered nurse Kim Haley checks Shawanda Jones' temperature.

knows exactly what's going on ... exactly what the end result will be. She still continues to be treated and continues to fight."

Haley had no particular desire to become an oncology nurse while in school, but was placed on an oncology floor as her first assignment after graduation. She already had developed sensitivity to the overwhelming challenges cancer patients face, as her mother underwent treatment for lymphoma during Haley's college days.

"I learned that you really need a health care advocate when you're going through all that" and navigating the maze of treatment, Haley said. "It makes me feel better if we can help them make that transition."

And she has no plans to leave anytime soon.

"My goal is to make this process as seamless as possible. If I can make it easier for the patient ... that's my purpose."•

— Diana Chandler

NURSE

Paula Harrelson

Position: oncology nurse, Touro Infirmary

Age: 52

Family: husband, Andrew; dogs, Hank, Willie

Education: nursing degree, Wesley Medical Center School of Nursing

In the 25 years since earning her nursing degree, Paula Harrelson has worked in intensive care, surgery and recovery units.

It's her experience overcoming a personal hardship, though, that has shown her where she really needs to be.

"Having lived through breast cancer, something changed in me," Harrelson said. "I knew I could put myself in the shoes of someone with cancer and could make a difference in their lives and inspire them. That's when I decided to take my life and career in a new direction."

In 2005, just one year removed from her own battle with breast cancer, Harrelson accepted a position with Hematology and Oncology Specialists, where she delivered chemotherapy to outpatients and assisted them with billing and prescription issues. She now does similar work at an outpatient clinic at Touro Infirmary, where she has made it her mission to spread

hope and relief to her patients and their families.

"I've been cancer free for five years, but getting there and getting through the treatment was tough," Harrelson said. "I understand the pain and suffering these patients go through. Some think they won't get through it. But you always do, and I use myself as an example."

Harrelson said she takes time to get to know all of her patients personally to identify their individual medical, nutritional and emotional needs. She finds it is just another way to keep them going on the right track.

She has even helped develop EnCourage, a support group that addresses some the issues affecting younger women with breast cancer.

"My partners felt there needed to be a community in the city where young women can go to find answers, share experiences and provide each other with support and hope."•

— Robin Shannon



Paula Harrelson checks on chemotherapy patient Cynthia Jouillian at Touro Infirmary's outpatient oncology center.

NURSE

Dianna Lauve

Position: radiation therapist and radiation oncology supervisor, Touro Infirmary

Age: 48

Family: husband, Russell; children, Candace, 20, Carlee 16

Education: bachelor's degree in science, University of St. Francis; pursuing master's degree in health care management, University of New Orleans

Dianna Lauve supervises what she calls a top notch team of health care professionals in Touro Infirmary's Radiation Oncology department.

She has worked as a radiation therapist at Touro for 23 years, a course she strategically charted after witnessing several family members suffer with cancer.

Before obtaining a bachelor's degree in science, Lauve said she trained in X-rays and used it "as an avenue to get into therapy school" so she would have the proper credentials to work with cancer patients. The rest was history.

Contrary to what some may think and often ask, Lauve said she's not pessimistic about her career or responsibilities with working with cancer patients. Rather, she said her stance is and has always been: "How can I help you get through this process."

And the mantra applies to patients and their families, particularly when the patient is a child. Lauve said Children's Hospital refers all of its cancer patients to her



photo by Frank Aymami

Radiation therapist Dianna Lauve prepares Tina Miceli for a CAT scan.

department for treatment. In such cases, she said a parent's pain is often more evident than the child's pain.

"The kids don't know what they're going through but their families sure do," she said.

Even in those situations, Lauve said the rewards have a tendency to come full circle to remind her that she helped someone during a trying process.

"We might have treated them (child patients) 10 years ago, but when they come back just for a checkup or just to say hi, that's what's rewarding," she said. "Working in this field helps people put life into perspective each and every day. I can honestly say that I've never taken a day or a minute for granted."•

— Nayita Wilson

NURSE

Kathy Steiner

Position: adult services director, Tulane Medical Center

Age: 64

Family: sons, Jeffrey, 45, Brad, 42, Tad, 39; 13 grandchildren

Education: diploma in nursing, Rockford Memorial Hospital School of Nursing; bachelor's degree in nursing, Rockford College; master's degree in nursing, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

After more than 30 years in nursing, Kathy Steiner has one thing to say about her retirement: It's not going to happen.

"It's too much a part of me. Nursing is a piece of who I am, and if I were to retire, I would never know what to do. This is where I want to be," said Steiner, 64, who has been director of adult services at Tulane Medical Center since January 2005.

Steiner, a member of the Tulane Medical Center staff for 24 years, manages seven units in the hospital, overseeing the daily issues of those departments and mentoring the nursing staff.

"One thing about management is you work through other people, and that gives you the latitude to make an impact through other nurses around here," Steiner said. "Every day it's about patients getting the kind of care we want to be known for. I call it situational leadership because it's a constantly changing and challenging environment with the quality of patient care our top priority."

Steiner said she fell in love with nursing at Rockford College in Illinois, and her time spent nursing in the intensive



photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Valeria Patterson, Kathy Steiner and Raven Moore discuss the day's patient load.

care unit validated her career choice.

"This may sound cliché, but I just remember sitting with patients and I knew I could make a difference. It was that feeling I had inside me," she said. "Nursing is a calling, and if I can touch someone's heart, I have made a difference."

In addition to her daily management responsibilities, Steiner is also working with Tulane Medical Center staff to

continue to rebuild the hospital to pre-Hurricane Katrina status. Like much of the staff, Steiner was evacuated from the rooftop of the hospital's garage after the storm.

"My staff needed to see positivism. They needed to know we were still a team, a family that was going to stick together, survive and come back."•

— Tommy Santora

NURSE

Mark Stockstill

Position: chief nursing officer, Slidell Memorial Hospital

Age: 47

Family: wife, Tania; children, Jeffrey, 21, Alex, 19, Brandon, 14, Torrie, 14, Ethan, 2

Education: associate degree's in nursing, Pearl River Community College

In more than two decades at Slidell Memorial Hospital, Mark Stockstill has overseen a growing nursing staff and an ongoing expansion of the hospital's technological support system.

But no matter how much things change at SMH, Stockstill remains true to the principles that lured him to health care in the first place.

"I used to be in law enforcement, and as a deputy I would respond to the scene of an accident. But then I would end up just standing there for 15 or 20 minutes until the ambulance came, not knowing what to do," Stockstill said.

That's when he became interested in studying emergency services.

"I didn't like the idea of not being able to do anything when someone was in need of help."

That philosophy continues to guide Stockstill. Frequently, he tells staff members to treat their patients the way they would want their mother treated. As an organizer of the hospital's Critical Action Team, Stockstill has spearheaded an effort to enhance patient care.

"The CAT was in response to a challenge put out by the Institute for Health Care Improvement," he said. "Their initia-

photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer



Mark Stockstill chats with Slidell Memorial Hospital nurse Valerie Matherne.

tive was to save 100,000 lives, and one of the subcomponents of that was a rapid response team."

At SMH, the team's efforts have reduced cardiac arrest cases by more than 50 percent.

The system works like this: When nurses on the regular unit have a patient they think is not doing well, they enact the rapid response team. Then, nurses from the intensive care unit and emergency department assess the patient and make treatment decisions on the spot.

As a member of SMH's senior management team, Stockstill, a former U.S. Air Force flight nurse, also has worked to develop and implement the hospital's overall care mission.

"It's something we take very seriously. Our overall emphasis has been and remains on patient safety and customer satisfaction. To that end we have insisted upon keeping our staff at levels we think are safe and well above the industry standard."•

— Garry Boulard

Wake Up!

IT'S TIME TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT BUSINESS



New Orleans
CITYBUSINESS

Subscribe now and get the Book of Lists valued at \$59 as part of your paid order.

Call 1-800-739-8836

to order your subscription and save up to 60% off the newsstand price!

Real heroes: Professionals Named Healthcare Heroes SMH



Donna Guzman, RN

The most outstanding thing about Donna is she truly takes to the seriousness of treatment like you would your own family. She is consistent, empathetic and a strong patient advocate. She borders that line between “Not My Job” and “Do the Right Thing.”



Joseph M. Epps, MD

After losing everything—home and 25-year practice in New Orleans—during Hurricane Katrina, the doctor began a practice once again in Slidell for a very needed specialty. Dr. Epps, a Neurosurgeon practicing full time and taking call in the SMH Emergency Room, is an integral resource for our community hospital.



Elizabeth Buras, RN, BSN

Liz demonstrates her compassion for humanity in the care she delivers to each patient as well as to his or her family members in every word she speaks, every smile she delivers and every gentle touch extended to calm a fear and share a moment of encouragement. She is truly “The Role Model” for the entire unit.



Mark Stockstill, RN, CNO

Mark is a vital part of the SMH Senior Management Team, carefully balancing administrative acumen with direct patient care. He led a Critical Action Team as part of the “100,000 Lives Campaign,” conducted by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, to great success. He has lobbied for top-of-the line equipment, including a new Telemetry monitoring system that, on its first day of use, alerted nurses that a patient was in crisis and a life was saved.



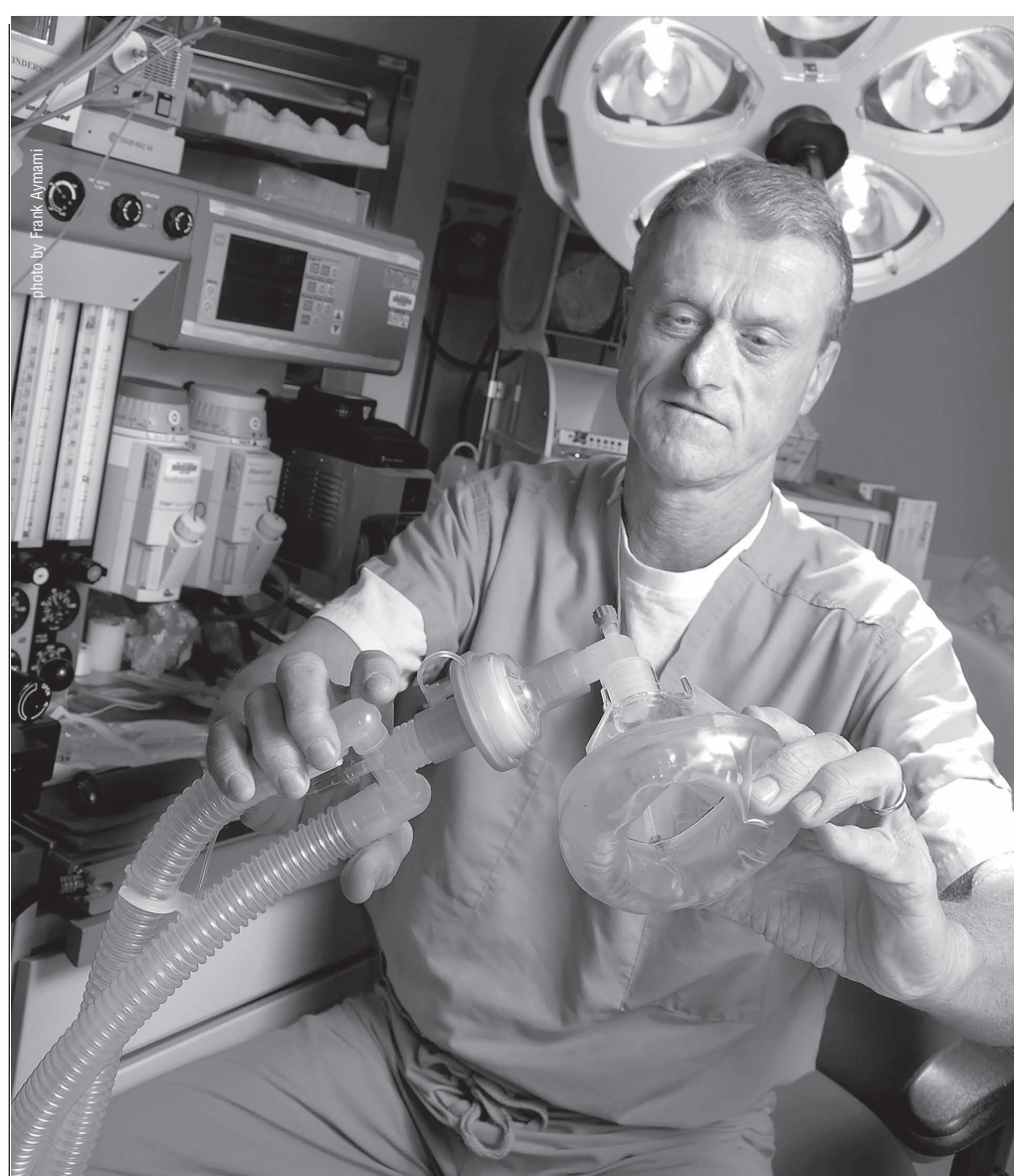
Viola Cocran

If you wanted a living symbol of a community hospital, you wouldn’t have to look farther than Viola Cocran. Even before SMH officially opened Nov., 16, 1959, she was there, working with other volunteers to create Slidell’s community hospital and keep it running smoothly when there were just three regular employees. Since that time, she has logged over 38,000 volunteer hours at SMH.



Matthew Curole

The word “No” is not in the vocabulary of Nutritional Services Director Matt Curole. He has created a family-like atmosphere for his department. To encourage healthy eating habits and weight management, he launched a “biggest loser” contest among his team and expanded the contest into a 16-week, hospital-wide competition. His positive attitude and the attitude of his staff have been contagious around the hospital.



PHYSICIAN

Glenn Casey

Position: anesthesiology chairman, Ochsner Baptist Medical Center

Age: 54

Family: wife, Eileen; children, Colin, 26, Blair, 24, Mairin, 18

Education: bachelor’s degree, Louisiana State University; doctor of medicine, LSU Medical Center and University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

Dr. Glenn Casey, chairman of anesthesiology at Ochsner Baptist Medical Center, faced what he calls his greatest career challenge when the former Baptist Memorial Hospital faced extinction after Hurricane Katrina.

“The greatest aspect of my career was trying to revive the (Baptist Memorial Hospital) campus after Katrina while trying to maintain the integrity of the medical staff,” Casey said. “We’ve made great strides.”

After much persistence by Casey and other medical personnel to keep the hospital open, Ochsner Health System purchased the 80-year-old facility in October 2006.

Casey’s connection to the hospital is not only related to his own career, but also the 40-year medical career of his father, Dr. Byron Casey, who practiced anesthesiology at Baptist Memorial Hospital from 1948-89.

“I always enjoyed talking to him about the practice of medicine,” Casey said.

At the time of the purchase, Glenn Casey

was also elected Ochsner Baptist Medical Center’s medical executive committee president, a position he held until 2008.

“It’s quite rewarding to deal with patients on a daily basis who have a need for the services you provide them.”

Casey’s leadership has helped the hospital staff grow to 250 community physicians. Its capability has also expanded to include the handling of nearly all medical and surgical cases, with the exception of trauma, obstetrics, open-heart and neurological surgery.

It presently operates 43 private medical or surgical beds, 12 intensive care unit beds, six operating rooms, two cardiac catheterization labs, two endoscopy suites, an imaging center and a full-service emergency room.

For Casey, his greatest career challenge is also his greatest feat.

“My greatest accomplishment is the resurgence of Baptist.”•

— Amy Ferrara Smith

PHYSICIAN

Pui Chun “Joan” Cheng

Position: gynecologic oncologist, Touro Infirmary

Age: 45

Family: husband, Bradley Bartholomew; children, Alexandra, 9, Chloe, 9, Isabella, 5, Tristen, 3 months

Education: bachelor’s degree in biology, Duke University; doctor of medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine

Dr. Pui Chun “Joan” Cheng was a fellow in gynecologic oncology at the University of Southern California when she treated a teacher who had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

“She was in the last couple of years of her life and was very sick with numerous problems caused by the cancer,” Cheng said. “All I could remember about this woman was how she never stopped living her life, how she lived every day to the fullest and kept doing all the things she enjoyed until she passed away.”

Cheng said the experience inspired her, and she tells her patients no matter what illness or adversity they encounter, they should live in the present and face their problems with a solid foundation of hope.

Cheng has been at Touro Infirmary since 2007 and was previously at Tulane Medical Center for 10 years. She is also a member of the Touro Cancer Center Steering Committee and helped form a monthly support group for women with gynecologic cancers.



photo by Frank Aymami

Dr. Joan Cheng reviews pelvic scans with patient Nicole Smith.

“Just listening to cancer patients lends a great deal of support to them,” she said. “They are going through a very difficult time in their lives, and so much of what we do is help people understand their illnesses and overcome the fears of what is going on in their body. It’s challenging because you take care of complex patients, but I also find my specialty very rewarding when you solve complex problems.”

Cheng is also shaping young doctors at Tulane and Louisiana State University as a professor in the obstetrics-gynecology department.

“It’s extremely important to teach young physicians about our specialty and serve as role models for our young physicians in training.”•

— Tommy Santora

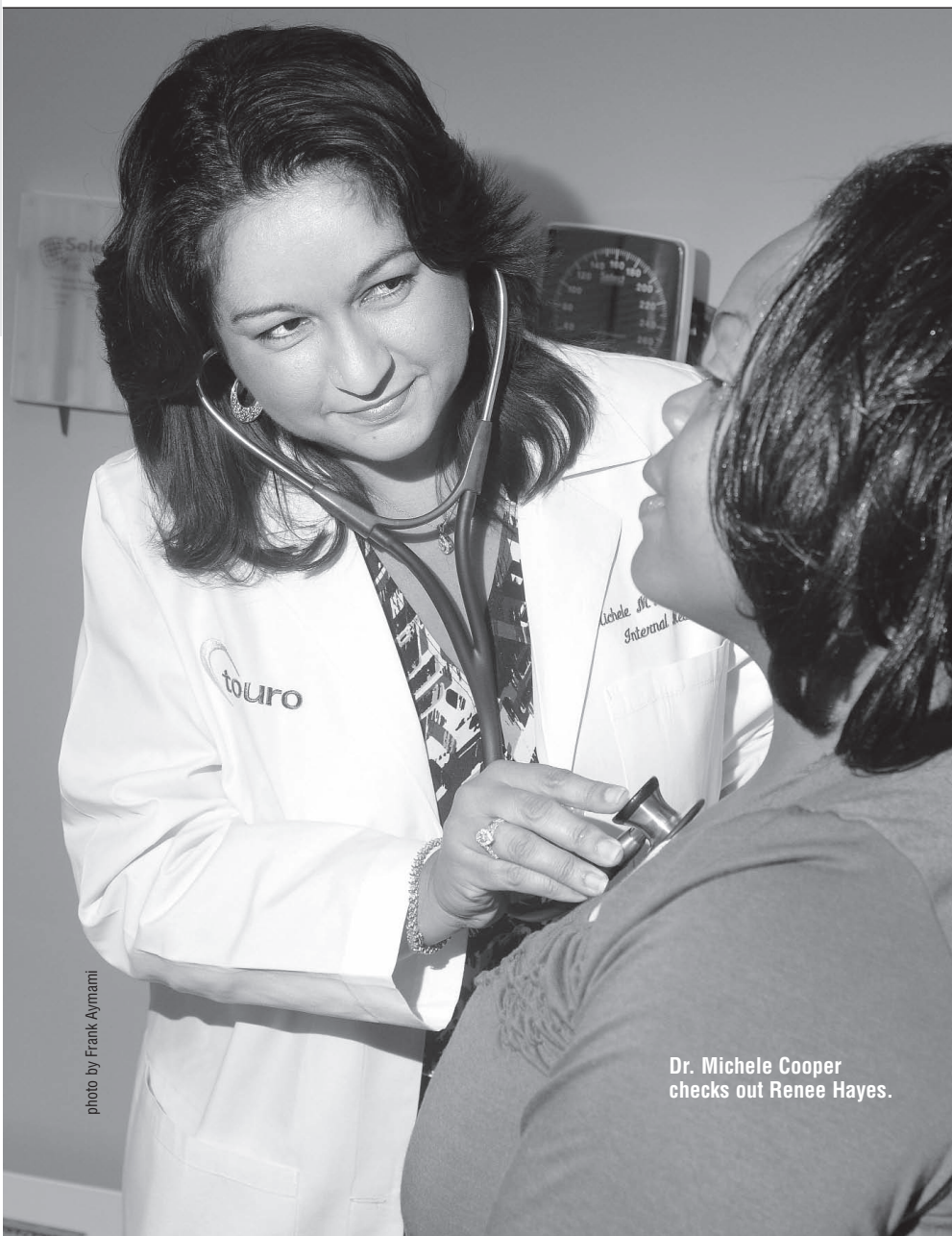


photo by Frank Aymami

Dr. Michele Cooper checks out Renee Hayes.

PHYSICIAN

Michele Cooper

Position: internal medicine doctor, Crescent City Physicians Inc. at Touro Infirmary

Age: 43

Family: husband, Todd Larche; children, Kristen, 8, Todd Jr., 3

Education: bachelor’s degree in pharmacy, Xavier University; doctor of medicine, Louisiana State University Medical School

A native New Orleanian and resident of eastern New Orleans, Dr. Michele Cooper is doing the best she can to bring normalcy back to residents still trying to rebuild their lives nearly four years after Hurricane Katrina.

“I feel a lot of satisfaction when I see how happy my patients are to be able to find quality health care or primary care in the neighborhood they have lived in for so long and are trying to bring back,” said Cooper, an internal medicine doctor with Crescent City Physicians Inc. at Touro Infirmary.

“(New Orleans) East had a very vibrant medical community prior to the hurricane, and it was basically wiped out. It’s rewarding to be able to help return this small but important element to the area. There are still very few physicians practicing out here, and we still have a very long way to go.”

Cooper had been practicing medicine in eastern New Orleans for four years before Katrina flooded her office with more than 6

feet of water and destroyed her home. Eight months pregnant with her second child and having a mother with Alzheimer’s disease, Cooper thought it best to leave New Orleans for a while. She moved to Maryland, where she stayed for a year before returning home to her practice.

Cooper said coming back after the storm was a challenge for her, especially in those first few weeks.

“No one was here, nothing was out there. It was dusty, desolate and dismal. It was worth it to come back because there were so many patients out here that felt neglected and believed nothing was coming back here.”

Cooper was a practicing pharmacist for 10 years before turning to the field of treatment. She said a need to do more for her patients drove her to medical school.

“I don’t want to say that pharmacy lacks importance, but I just felt that I could contribute more in medicine,” Cooper said. •

— Robin Shannon

PHYSICIANS

Frank DellaCroce

Position: co-founder, Center for Restorative Breast Surgery

Age: 42

Family: wife, Janet; children, Hannah, 13, Nicolas, 10, Holley, 7

Education: bachelor's degree in pre-medicine, Northeast Louisiana University; doctor of medicine, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

Scott Sullivan

Position: co-founder, Center for Restorative Breast Surgery

Age: 44

Family: wife, Michele Cooper; daughters, Alexis, 9, Elle, 5

Education: bachelor's degree in biomedical engineering, Tulane University; doctor of medicine, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer



Frank DellaCroce, left, and Scott Sullivan.

Drs. Frank DellaCroce and Scott Sullivan bring an individual appreciation for the aesthetic to their joint practice at the Center for Restorative Breast Surgery.

Sullivan's distaste for the staid appearance of traditional doctors' offices blends with DellaCroce's appreciation of women's maternal qualities and natural anatomy, leading to a spa-like setting where patients enjoy aesthetically pleasing results.

"I still can't stand going into a doctor's office and it's like a bus station. It's so impersonal, sitting on chairs and everyone staring at each other," said Sullivan, who as a child battling recurring bronchitis dreaded physicians in white coats

and hospitals that smelled of rubbing alcohol.

"I appreciate the artistry that is a woman's body," DellaCroce said. "To see that lost, harmed or hurt through surgical treatment, for me, is tragic."

The two bring years of innovation and experience to their joint practice dedicated to reconstructing the breasts of women facing mastectomies in fighting cancer.

They are noted for the sensitivity they display in preserving the female form in the nipple-sparing mastectomy procedure they pioneered, avoiding implants by using fat from the patient's body and leaving as little scarring as possible. Sullivan said they replace breast tissue with similar tissue

from such parts of the body as the stomach, preserving a life-like result and also considering the appearance of the site from which tissue is taken.

"It's changing their life, retaining their femininity," Sullivan said. "What they are most afraid of is being deformed."

More than half their patients are from outside Louisiana and the United States.

"It's almost to the point that patients don't want to leave the doctor's office," Sullivan said. "We've had patients who, after going to the hotel (after recovery) decided to spend the day at the hospital."•

— Diana Chandler

PHYSICIAN

Joseph Epps

Position: neurosurgeon, Slidell Memorial Hospital

Age: 67

Family: wife, Shirley; daughters, Nikki, 34, Kelly, 30

Education: bachelor's degree in zoology, Howard University; doctor of medicine, Howard University College of Medicine

For Dr. Joseph Epps, a neurosurgeon at Slidell Memorial Hospital, medicine is a family tradition. His father, Joseph, was a general surgeon, and his mother, Sara, was a social worker. While he became a doctor of medicine, his sister, Grace, earned her doctorate in medical education.

"My entire family was involved in the medical field," said Epps, who is the only neurosurgeon practicing full-time and taking calls in Slidell Memorial Hospital's emergency room. "I knew of nothing else."

Epps and his wife, Shirley, a registered nurse, maintain a practice in Slidell. Their daughter, Nikki, is an instructor of anatomy and physiology at Colorado Technical University, while daughter Kelly will participate in a cardiology fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania that starts in June.

A native of New Orleans, Epps graduated from Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he stayed for medical school, a residency in general surgery and a neurology fellowship.

When he returned to New Orleans, he set up his practice in eastern New Orleans and became the city's first African-American neurosurgeon. Epps also was one of the first 10

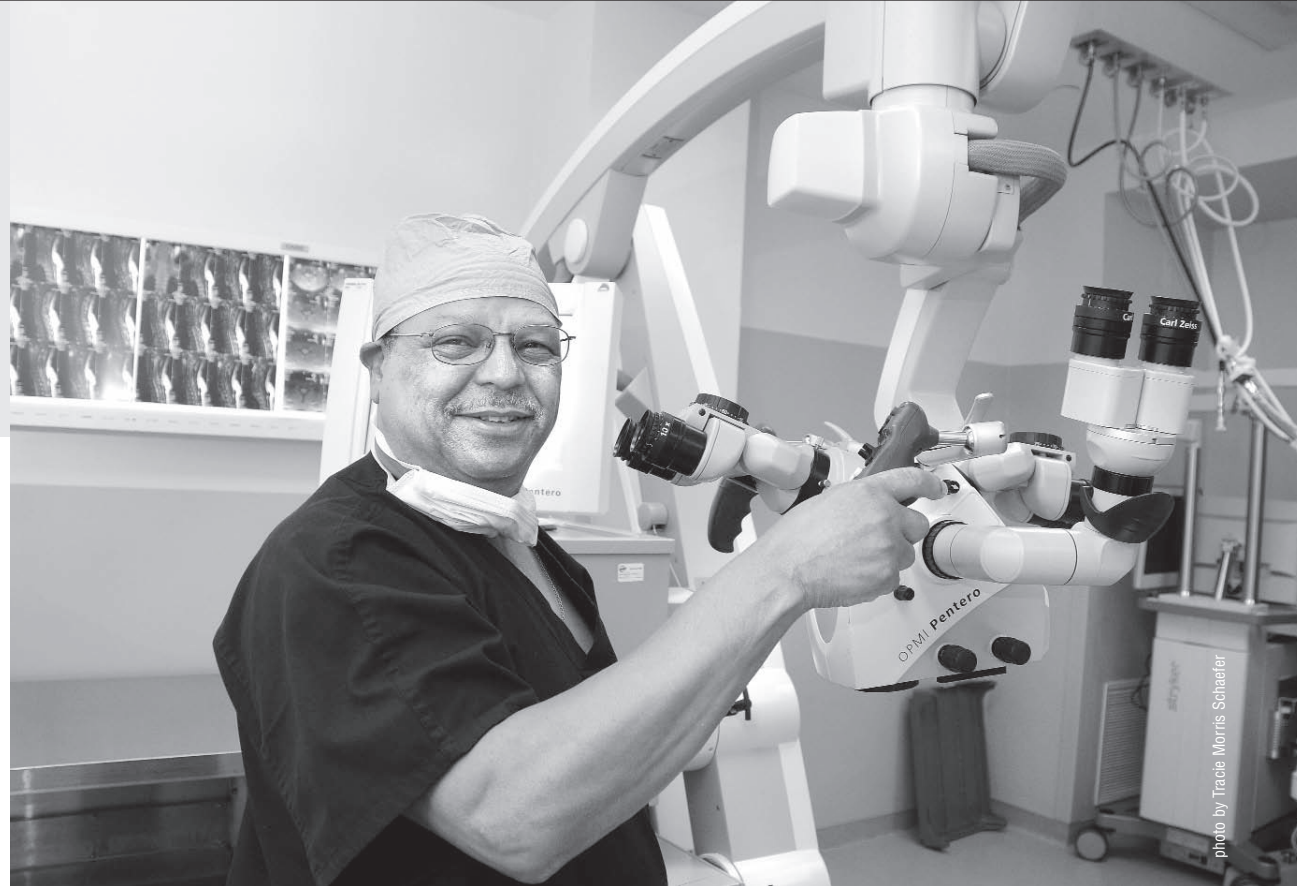


photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

African-American neurosurgeons trained in the country.

Throughout his career, Epps said his greatest accomplishment has been surviving and recovering from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, during which he lost his house and practice. Through it all, though, Epps used his self-invented electronic medical record system that allowed him to forward displaced patients' records to physicians throughout the country.

Until the storm, he also acted as a clinical professor of neurosurgery at Tulane University for nearly 30 years where he taught 20 residents about neurosurgery. Teaching others about medicine, he said, has been one of the most rewarding aspects of his career.

"The interchange and education of those residents is what I feel most strongly about."•

— Amy Ferrara Smith

PHYSICIAN

Sander Florman

Position: associate professor of surgery and pediatrics, Tulane University School of Medicine; director of abdominal transplantation, Tulane Medical Center and Children's Hospital

Age: 41

Family: wife, Toby; children, Zachary, 10, Frankie, 7, Eric, 3

Education: bachelor's degree in philosophy, Brandeis University; doctor of medicine, University of Louisville School of Medicine

Dr. Sandy Florman and his team at Tulane University School of Medicine perform an average of 200 organ transplants a year, but one recent transplant holds a special place in Florman's heart.

Two days before Christmas last year, Florman performed an auto kidney transplant on a 6-year-old boy, removing and repairing the organ rather than replacing it with a donor organ. He had carried out the procedure on two adults but never on a child.

The surgery was a success. Two months later, the boy was off his blood pressure medicine, back in school and doing what normal 6-year-old boys do, Florman said.

"It's an extremely uncommon procedure but the only kind of surgery we could have done on him to save him," Florman said. "It was a tremendous feeling to see that outcome. The family was eternally grateful, and that's a big reason why you do this, to see those kinds of success stories."

Florman is an associate professor of surgery and pediatrics at Tulane University School of Medicine and director of abdominal transplantation at Tulane Medical Center



Registered nurse Claudine Grobart chats with Dr. Sander Florman.

and Children's Hospital. In addition to surgical transplants, Florman and his team also handle non-transplant problems related to the liver, kidneys and pancreas.

"It's not always about surgery and transplants. We have a group of medical and surgical people who put their

heads together and come up with a best treatment on a patient-by-patient basis," Florman said.

"It requires a team, a lot of people to make this happen, and I am fortunate to work with an incredible staff."•

— Tommy Santora

PHYSICIAN

Ana Hands

Position: international health and transplant services director, Ochsner Health System

Age: 47

Family: single

Education: bachelor's degrees in biology and psychology, University of Monterrey in Mexico; doctor of medicine, University of Zulia, Maracaibo in Venezuela

Dr. Ana Hands has taken the lead on eliminating cultural barriers for Ochsner Health System's patients by ensuring its staff is trained to communicate and connect with patients of various cultures.

As director of international health and transplant services, Hands coordinates language interpretation services for patients who speak all languages, including individuals who are hearing impaired. She also has provided basic Spanish training for more than 400 Ochsner employees since 2005 and plans on implementing basic English training for Spanish-speaking employees this year.

Hands said the employees' training needs resulted from an increase in the local Hispanic population after Hurricane Katrina. The influx required each Ochsner campus to provide "quality services" to patients in their own language, she said.

Each year, Ochsner treats about 5,000 international patients from places such as Saudi

Arabia, Central America and the Bahamas. A significant number are referrals from Puerto Rico, where socioeconomic issues are coupled with language and education barriers, she said.

In one case, a Puerto Rican patient was flown to Ochsner for emergency transplant, and Hands' staff worked to meet the patient's one request upon arrival — to have a hamburger. Her team fulfilled the request without realizing it would be the patient's last meal — he passed away before the transplant.

The incident remains fresh in Hands' mind mostly because of the depth of gratitude she received from the patient's wife and children, who said the service they received at Ochsner exceeded the level of care they would have received in their home country.

"I said to myself, 'Wow, we must be doing something right,'" Hands said. "The kind of job we do, we make people happy even when the end result is not what we expect."•

— Nayita Wilson



photo by Frank Aymami

PHYSICIAN

Timothy Harlan

Position: medical director, Tulane University Medical Group; assistant professor of medicine, department of internal medicine

Age: 50

Family: wife, Morgan

Education: bachelor's degree in anthropology, Emory University; doctor of medicine, Emory University School of Medicine

There is nothing Dr. Timothy Harlan enjoys more than interacting with his patients.

"There is a limitation that any physician has in terms of how many patients they can see in a day," Harlan said. "If I am lucky, in the morning, I can see a dozen patients. I don't think I will ever stop doing that. It is a terrific experience."

One of the reasons Harlan enjoys talking to and getting to know his patients is because of what he learns from them.

"Just by listening to what people are saying, talking about lives and such, you can really learn a lot. Interacting with patients and being with patients and trying to help them is a joyous way to spend the day — and that is a big part of my life."

Harlan moved to New Orleans in 2007 and quickly embraced the health care challenges of the city as well as its culture, history and people.

"They go together," said Harlan, who in

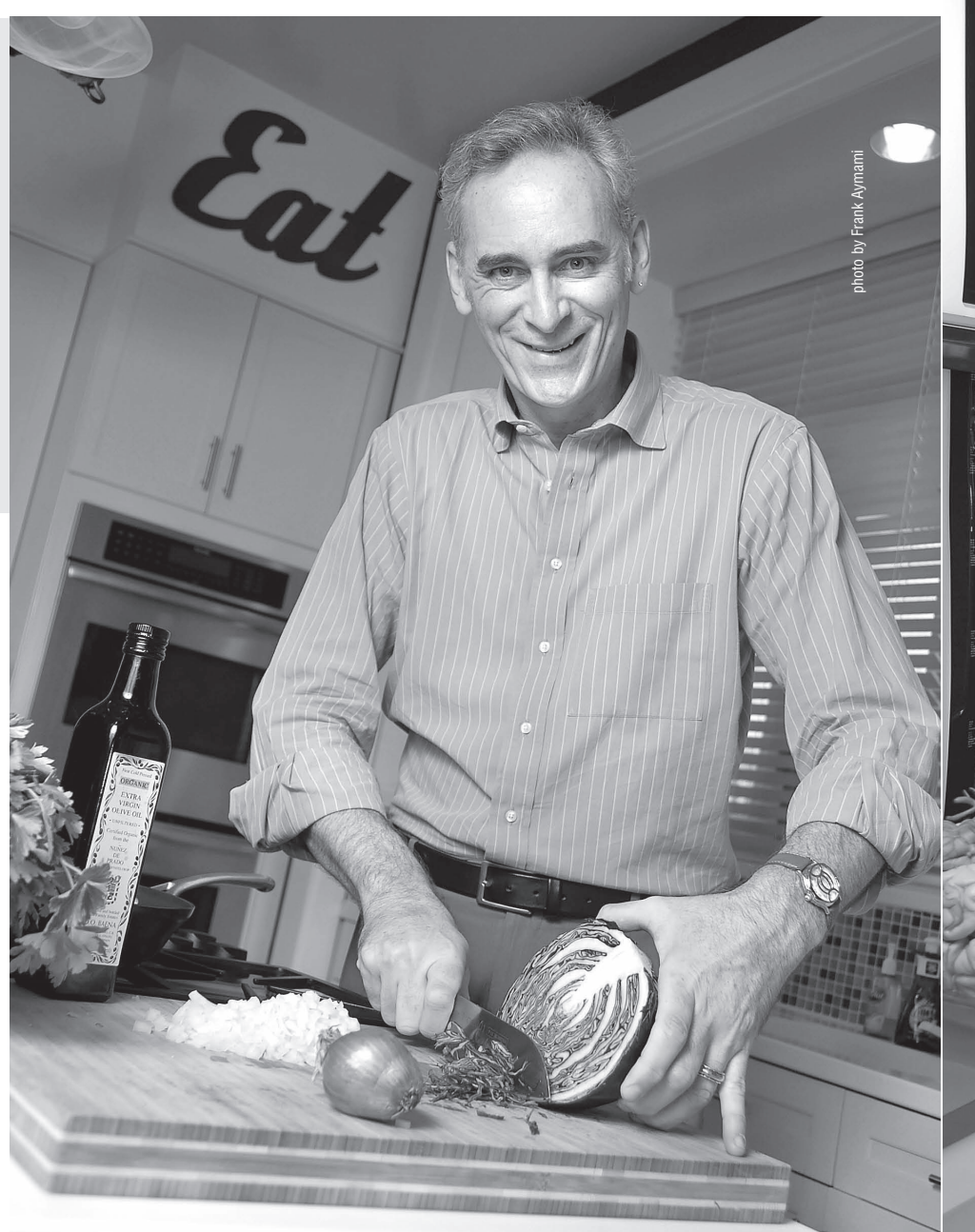
his free time maintains the Web site www.drgourmet.com, which is devoted to the principles of eating well and eating healthy.

As a result of his conversations with patients and because of his own love for cooking, Harlan emphasizes healthy eating any chance he gets. It is a mission he believes folds in perfectly with the roots of New Orleans, despite popular perceptions that food and how it is made and consumed in the city is a decadent thing.

"Louisiana Cajun and Creole cooking is the distillation of the Mediterranean diet," Harlan said. "A lot of our food ... has been corrupted by poor cooking techniques and high-processed and higher-fat ingredients."

"But when you stop and consider the basic foundations of the Mediterranean diet, New Orleans has it all. This is what has given us beans, healthy whole grains, rice. You can go on and on."•

— Garry Boulard



PHYSICIAN

Peter Hertzak

Position: owner, Hertzak Laser Center

Age: 62

Family: wife, Diana Gillmore; children, Peter, 37, Allison, 21

Education: doctor of medicine, University of Zagreb, Croatia

On the surface, the cosmetic procedures Dr. Peter Hertzak performs are more about making his patients happy with the way they look than making them healthier.

But the results usually turn out to be more than just skin deep.

"Probably 80 or 90 percent of the time, I hear from the patient that after having one of these procedures, they find that they have turned a new leaf in their lives," said Hertzak, who opened the Hertzak Laser Center in Slidell in 2006.

"I've seen this especially after a tummy tuck or liposuction, neither of which is a weight-loss procedure. But (the patients) have later engaged in an active program of exercise and lost weight. The procedure gives them the initial stimulus, and then they follow through."

Initially trained as a specialist in obstetrics and gynecology, Hertzak found his surgical

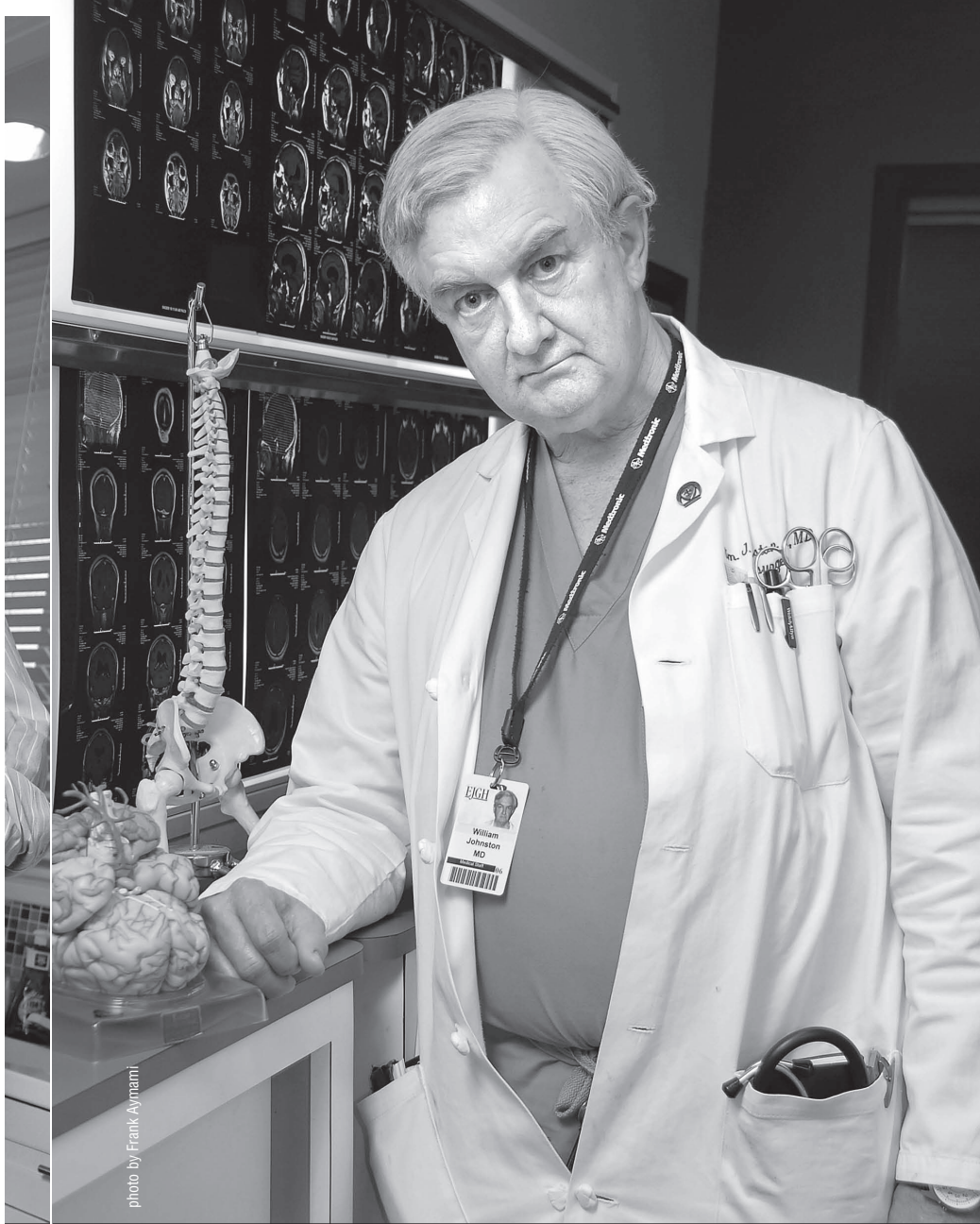
patients often would inquire about the possibility of a little extra nip and tuck while they were on the operating table, so he decided to complete additional training in cosmetic surgery.

He's performed more than 2,000 tummy tucks and also does breast augmentation, body contouring, liposuction with fat transfer, such as to the buttocks or breasts, and laser vaginal rejuvenation — a procedure he said "restores a woman's intimate anatomy to the way it was before giving birth to her first child."

His facility also provides nonsurgical procedures such as intense pulsed light hair and pigment removal and laser skin rejuvenation.

A native of Croatia who arrived in Slidell in 1981 by way of Detroit, Hertzak is noted for his compassion. When Hurricane Gustav was approaching the area, he volunteered to be the lone physician to stay at the Doctor's Hospital of Slidell.•

— Sonya Stinson



PHYSICIAN

William Johnston

Position: neurosurgeon, East Jefferson General Hospital

Age: 63

Family: wife, Rosalie; children, Allison Deviney, 34, Guy, 30

Education: bachelor's degree in botany, University of Southwestern Louisiana; doctor of medicine, Louisiana State University Medical School

Dr. William Johnston acknowledges popular perceptions of neurosurgery often make people uncomfortable, particularly when it comes to something like removing a brain tumor.

"I sometimes feel that way myself," Johnston said.

But in a career spanning about four decades, Johnston has made strides in trying to make the mysterious and complicated seem less so.

"I think it accomplishes nothing by telling a patient something they might like to hear but you know you can't come through with. And almost without exception, I have found if you look a person right in the face and tell them the truth, which includes telling them what they can do about a particular situation, they will do a lot better than if you try to sugarcoat something."

After graduating from medical school, Johnston set up a practice in New Orleans before going to work for East Jefferson

General Hospital, where he is now the chief of neurosurgery.

And while he has treated thousands of patients, Johnston said some cases are still sobering.

"Typically we have a pretty good idea from our pre-operative images studies what the problem is exactly," Johnston said. "The challenge is then to do as much as you can for the patient, to find as much good time as you can."

But there are a lot of brain tumors that can be removed completely with a very good outcome, Johnston said. Not long ago, he and his team saw a man who had a huge benign tumor that occupied the front half of his brain cavity.

"He had lost his job and was having all kinds of troubles," Johnston said. "He wasn't functioning properly. Finally, someone did a scan of his head and the tumor was discovered. We removed it and he has done very well."•

— Garry Boulard

PHYSICIAN

Leslie Levenson

Position: interventional cardiologist, Heart Clinic of Louisiana

Age: 63

Family: wife, Gayle; children, Lisa, 37, Lauren, 20, Jonathan, 20

Education: bachelor's degree in biology, Boston University; doctor of medicine, University of Vermont Medical School

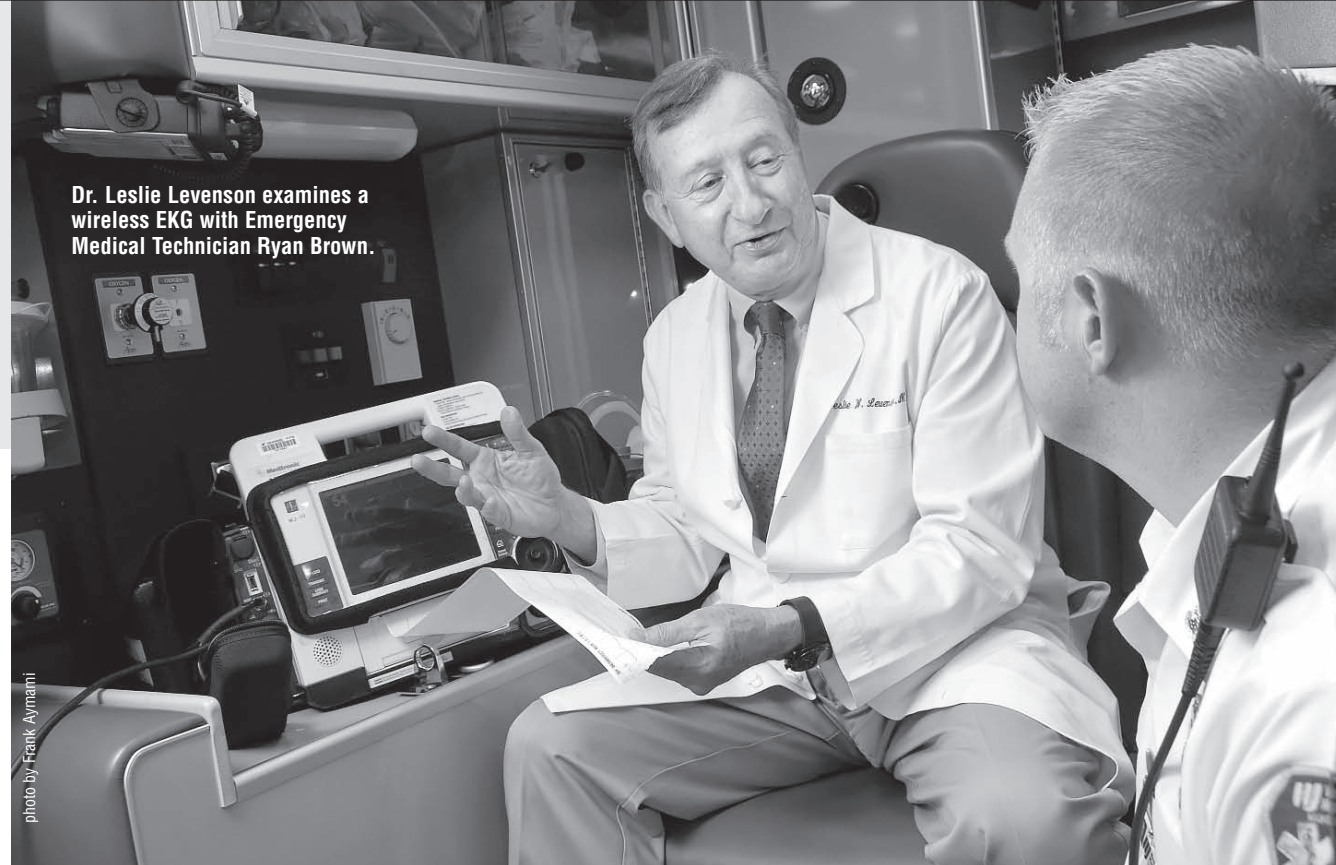
After Hurricane Katrina, Dr. Leslie Levenson saw a lot of his colleagues leave the New Orleans area for other business opportunities. He also had several offers to leave the city and take his practice elsewhere.

"But I never considered leaving," Levenson said. "I like it too much here, and the residents of this city, coming back and rebuilding their homes and their lives, that's an inspiration to me. I wouldn't want any other patients somewhere else."

The 63-year-old has called the West Bank of New Orleans home for 33 years as an interventional cardiologist at the Heart Clinic of Louisiana. He also said the shortage of cardiologists in the New Orleans area helped solidify his decision to maintain his practice.

Levenson said he wanted to be a cardiologist since he was a kid and was inspired by Dr. James Gault, chief cardiologist at Penn State University, who mentored him while he was a fellow at the school.

"He made me really excited about cardiology and inspired me to do more. He made me realize ... that we can give people all kinds of medications and do all kinds of



Dr. Leslie Levenson examines a wireless EKG with Emergency Medical Technician Ryan Brown.

different surgeries on them, but they also have to help themselves and participate in their health care — exercising right, eating right and living right. That's what I teach my patients."

Coronary disease causes one out of every five deaths in the United States, and 60 million Americans have some form of cardiovascular disease, according to the American Heart Association. Levenson said improvements in medicine,

including better stents to prop open arteries, have enabled him to better perform open-heart procedures.

"Advances in technology and surgical equipment have become a lot more sophisticated in the past five years. Everything is more user friendly, keeping vessels open for longer periods of time, helping both the doctors and the patients."•

— Tommy Santora

PHYSICIAN

Steve Levine

Position: pediatric intensive care unit medical director, Children's Hospital

Age: 59

Family: wife, Shari; children, Jennifer, 26, Benjamin, 22

Education: bachelor's degree in sociology, State University of New York, Stony Brook; doctor of medicine, The Autonomous University of Guadalajara, Mexico

Throughout his career, Dr. Steven Levine, medical director of the intensive care unit at Children's Hospital, has been instrumental in children's medical care throughout Louisiana.

In 1985, he worked to help Ochsner Medical Center become the first and only lung transplant center in the state until Hurricane Katrina. He's also helped increase the number of beds at Children's Hospital's intensive care unit from four to 30.

"We like to walk the walk, not just talk the talk," said Levine, who is board certified in pediatric pulmonary and critical care. "We're here to turn kids back to their parents. It's very gratifying."

In June, Children's Hospital will open its Michael Jeffrey Lupin Pediatric Intensive Care Unit for kids with life-threatening illnesses and injuries.

"The kids we haven't saved, they really crawl into your hearts. It's challenging," he said.

Levine came to New Orleans in 1979 to participate in a pediatric pulmonary fellowship at Tulane University with



photo by Frank Aymami

Dr. William Waring. He credits Waring and Dr. Aaron Rausen, chairman of pediatrics at Beth Israel University in New York when Levine did his pediatric residency there, with inspiring him throughout his career.

"They taught me to never be complacent, to never give up, to have patience with the kids and their families, and to

maintain an inquisitive mind."

Three years after working with Waring, Levine joined Children's Hospital in 1981.

"I thought this was an interim position," he said. "But I fell in love with the city, the ICU and Children's."•

— Amy Ferrara Smith

PHYSICIANS

Victor Lucas

Position: pediatric cardiology section head, Ochsner Health System

Age: 47

Family: wife, Betsy; children, Victor, 18, Nicholas, 16, Amanda, 10

Education: bachelor's degree in chemistry and biology, Southeastern University; doctor of medicine, Medical University of South Carolina

Dennis Mello

Position: pediatric and congenital cardiac surgery chief, Ochsner Health System

Age: 44

Family: wife, Rachel; children, Chris, 12, Jack, 7, Olivia, 6

Education: bachelor's degree in biology, Yale University; doctor of medicine, University of Connecticut School of Medicine

Chris Snyder

Position: pediatric electrophysiology head, Ochsner Health System

Age: 42

Family: wife, Allison; children, Ainsley, 7, Katelyn, 5

Education: bachelor's degree in biology, Wayne State University; doctor of medicine, Wayne State University School of Medicine

Physicians who have been exposed to health care systems in underdeveloped parts of the world say Americans often don't realize that many citizens of foreign countries fail to receive even basic care.

Drs. Victor "Sam" Lucas, Dennis Mello and Chris Snyder went on a mission trip to Paraguay in November to perform cardiac work for people who would die if left untreated.

Mello was making his fifth mission trip to Paraguay, where he performed cardiac surgery on children with congenital heart diseases.

"It's life or death," Mello said. "You feel like you're giving a kid a new life."

Mello asked Lucas to join the mission to expand the available services to include curative catheter procedures, which prevent the need for open-heart surgery.

"Their families are just as happy to have their kids healthy as we are, and they never thought they'd be able to get this care," Lucas said.

Snyder, who had been on a mission to St. Petersburg, Russia, with Mello, was there to perform electrophysiology procedures. While Snyder enjoyed caring for the patients, he echoed a sentiment Lucas and Mello share — namely that the mission is just as much about teaching the Paraguayan physicians as it is about treating the children.

In the years since Mello started the Paraguay missions — he's made 10 trips in the past eight years — the number of procedures has grown dramatically. In his first year, he operated on three children. The second year, seven.

"Each year, we get to treat more and more, and provide more complex procedures," Mello said.

And each year, the Paraguayan surgeons the mission works with become more proficient, the doctors said.

The end goal is still in the distance, but it is a simple one. "Let every kid in the world get treated the same," Mello said. •

— Fritz Esker



photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Drs. Dennis Mello, Chris Snyder and Sam Lucas.

PHYSICIAN

Robert Post

Position: medical director, Daughters of Charity Services of New Orleans

Age: 45

Family: wife, Maggie Silio; children, Molly, 12, Lou, 9

Education: bachelor's degree in psychology, Northwestern University; doctor of medicine, University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine

The “medical home” model Dr. Robert Post uses as medical director of the Daughters of Charity Services of New Orleans gives patients an active role in managing their care.

“We have a care management team that assists people in self-managing their chronic illnesses,” said Post, who manages community health care centers in Bywater, Carrollton and Metairie.

He also oversees the Neighborhood Health Partnership; the Seton Resource Center, which provides school-based child development services; the Integrated Mobile Assessment Team, which does homeless outreach; and the Latino Health Access Network.

Staff members also maintain disease registries and track patients who see specialists and obtain other health services at facilities outside the Daughters of Charity system. For Post, the payoff for those efforts comes when patients’ health care outcomes are evaluated.

“We’ve seen dramatic improvements in the results for people with diabetes, asthma and cardiovascular disease,” Post said. “It’s rewarding because we know we’re impacting a much larger population that we could individually see.”

Post trained as a community health physician at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, where he did his residency in



photo by Frank Aymami

Dr. Bob Post works with Sister Mary John Code.

family medicine. He practiced at a health center in Algiers just before taking his current position 10 years ago.

For Post, one of the greatest benefits of community health care is that it reaches a patient population that traditionally is at high risk for chronic illnesses but often has limited access to medical services.

“I believe access to primary care is the key to eliminating any health disparities that we have. Unfortunately, in New Orleans we have an inordinate percentage of the population that’s at risk. By providing high-quality primary care, we can eliminate some of those health disparities.”•

— Sonya Stinson

PHYSICIAN

Erich Richter

Position: neurology department chairman, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

Age: 36

Family: wife, Desiree; children, Ana, 9, Moses, 7, Abigail, 6, Adelaide, 18 months

Education: bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, University of Florida; doctor of medicine, Ohio State University School of Medicine and Public Health

Early in his career, Dr. Erich Richter came across a patient with a severe tremor who could not pick up a cup, write his name or do anything with his hands.

To help the patient, Richter crafted a wireless pacemaker device that uses electrodes to stimulate specific parts of the brain and reduce involuntary movements and tremors.

The tremors went away, and the patient was able to pick up a cup and take a sip of water.

“It was about 10 years ago and I was just beginning my career, but that was the very first time that I realized I wanted to experience that kind of rewarding feeling over and over again,” Richter said. “It felt real good to help people and watch the patient respond the way he did.”

Now, Richter is helping New Orleans patients with epilepsy and Parkinson’s disease as chairman of the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center Department of Neurology.

Richter came to New Orleans in 2007 from Mercer

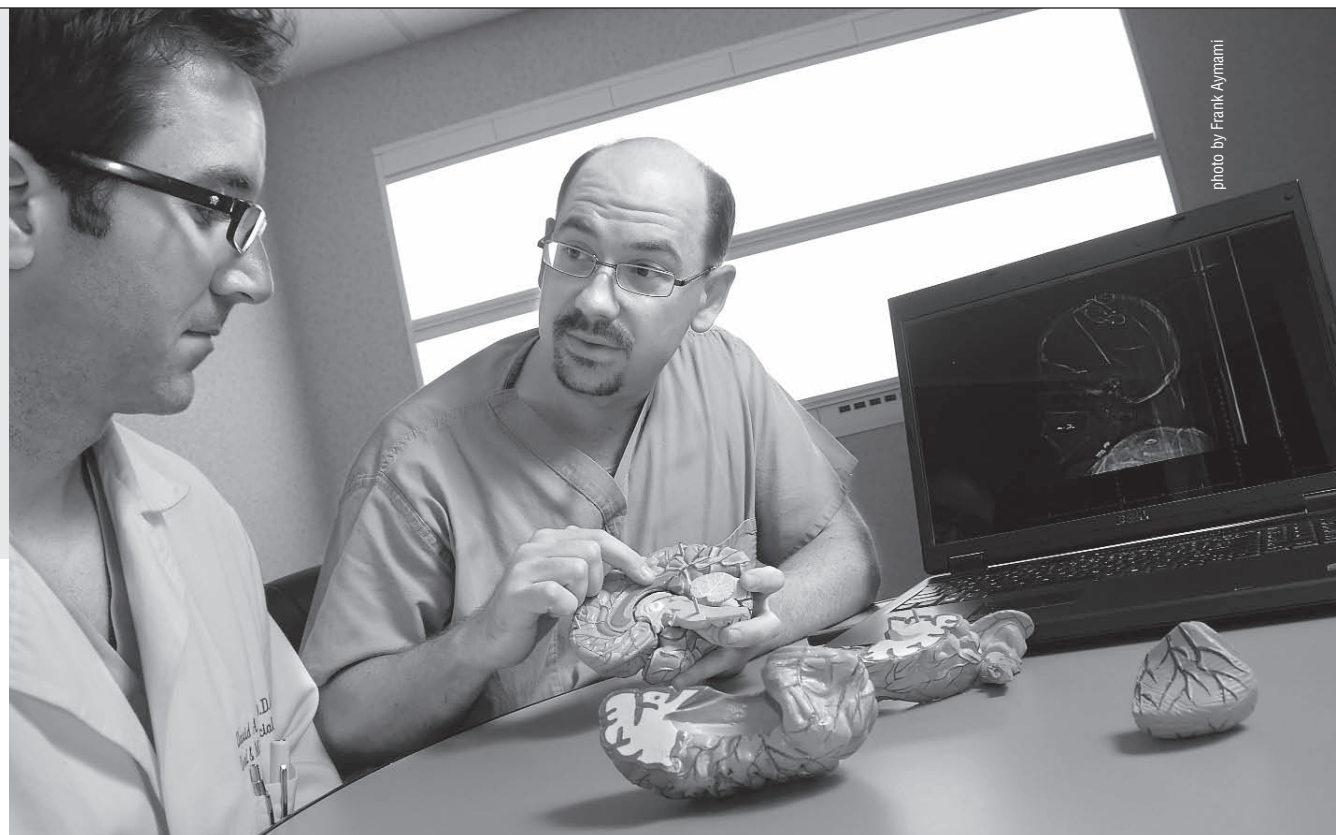


photo by Frank Aymami

Dr. Erich Richter reviews a deep brain stimulator case with resident David Bulot.

Medical School in Macon, Ga., and was lured to the area by Frank Culicchia, chairman of the LSU Department of Neurosurgery, to fill a void in the community for a functional neurosurgeon — one who could treat movement disorders.

Richter also saw the need to inform more New Orleanians about various forms of brain diseases by starting the Neurosurgery Information blog at [http://neuro-](http://neuro-surgeryinfo.blogspot.com)

[surgeryinfo.blogspot.com](http://neuro-surgeryinfo.blogspot.com).

“It provides a forum for the online exchange of information about diseases of the brain,” Richter said. “We have four doctors in the neurology department who participate, and we answer all kinds of questions for people who maybe they feel their own doctors haven’t answered, or if they’re still confused after their doctor visits.”•

— Tommy Santora

PHYSICIAN

Carlos Rodriguez-Fierro

Position: medical director, Cardiology Center at West Jefferson Medical Center

Age: 50

Family: wife, Ingrid; children, Nicole, 17, Christina, 16, Carlos Gabriel, 13, Priscilla, 10, Julian, 9, Christian, 4

Education: bachelor's degree in biology and chemistry, Florida International University; doctor of medicine, Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine at the University of Miami



When a patient comes to a hospital suffering from a heart attack, it is literally a matter of life and death. Every second and every action counts and a doctor in such a situation can bring a patient back to life.

This is what makes Dr. Carlos Rodriguez-Fierro's job challenging and rewarding.

A case that stands out involved a woman in her early 30s who was rushed to the hospital because of a heart attack. The woman was pronounced dead and was receiving CPR and defibrillator treatments. Rodriguez-Fierro put a stent in one of her main arteries, the patient was brought back to life and she went home just four days later.

What sticks out in Rodriguez-Fierro's mind was how

young the patient was to suffer a heart attack and how rapidly everything moved.

"We worked on her so fast and we were able to bring her back," Rodriguez-Fierro said.

In addition to his emergency work in the New Orleans region, Rodriguez-Fierro goes on missions to perform surgical work. He traveled to Managua, Nicaragua, and performed the first open-heart surgery there after Hurricane Mitch in 1998. He also did a medical mission in Honduras

shortly after Mitch and returned one week a month for five months to provide general medical assistance.

Rodriguez-Fierro is also involved in Doctors to the Rescue, a charity that donates bicycles and toys to children of military families with a parent stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan.

"It's a selfish cause," he said. "The most rewarding thing you can see is a smile on a kid's face."•

— Fritz Esker

PHYSICIAN

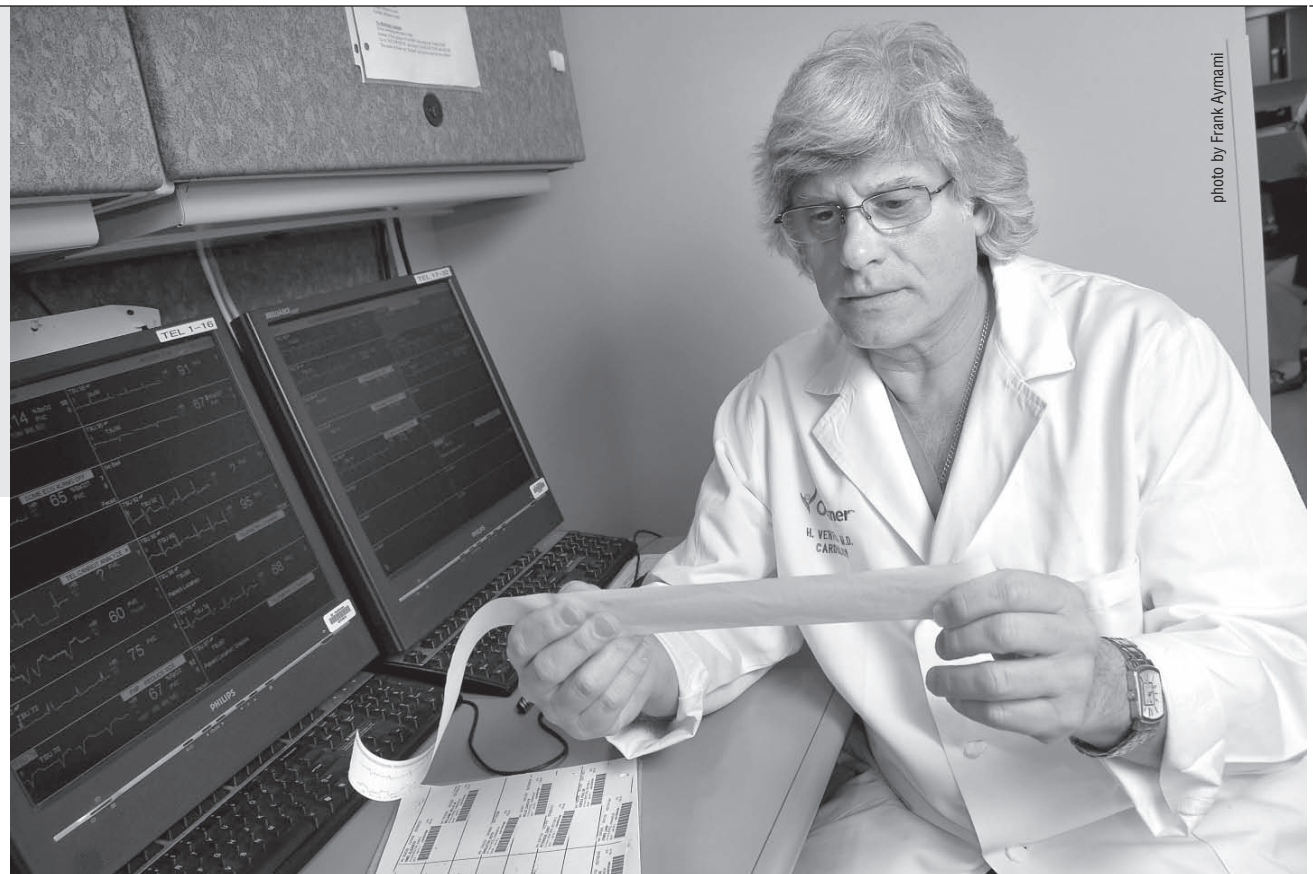
Hector Ventura

Position: medical director of the advanced heart failure and cardiac transplant center, Ochsner Medical Center

Age: 58

Family: wife, Laurie; children, Austin, 16, Lieghton, 15, Mariel, 13

Education: doctor of medicine, National University School of Medicine in Buenos Aires



For Dr. Hector Ventura, success is not complicated at all. It's simply treating patients at the clinic with care and ensuring their medical needs are met.

Ventura, medical director for Ochsner Medical Center's advanced heart failure and cardiac transplant department, said he sees an average of 22 patients a day, all of whom he and his staff follow before and after surgery.

The Argentina native completed his medical residency at the Central Military Hospital in Buenos Aires and later completed training in terminal medication and cardiology at Ochsner. In 2007, Ventura participated in Ochsner's 700th heart transplant, one of only 10 transplant centers nationwide that have reached that benchmark.

Ventura, who has worked at Ochsner for 25 years, has garnered numerous success stories throughout that journey. Three cases unique to Ventura involve three brothers, all of whom were diagnosed with cardiomyopathy, a type of heart diseases that enlarges and thickens the heart muscle and reduces its ability to pump blood.

Ventura has worked with the family for the past six years.

The two oldest brothers underwent heart transplants successfully, and Ventura continues to monitor the youngest sibling.

"They're my patients and I'll always work with them," he said.

Ventura said he always wanted to be a physician, but nothing in particular steered him toward cardiology.

In medicine, he said, "regardless of what you do, you try to help people get better, and that's what I like about the job."

Ventura said he leads by example and believes he and his staff are provided the tools they need to be successful.

The ultimate contribution, he said, is to take care of the patients.

"Our job is to take care of the patients, and we do quite well when we take care of that. The patients are the most important thing. If we do that, we'll be fine."•

— Nayita Wilson

PROFESSIONAL

Stephen Baldwin

Position: vice president of operations, Tulane Medical Center

Age: 34

Education: bachelor's degree in finance, Louisiana State University; master's degree in health administration, Tulane University

At age 34, Stephen Baldwin, vice president of operations at Tulane Medical Center, already has a wealth of experience from rebuilding a hospital that incurred \$100 million in damage from Hurricane Katrina.

After the storm, Baldwin led the rebuilding of Tulane's Cancer Center, a \$12 million project that included construction, gathering staff and recruiting physicians, all from Tulane's temporary location in Covington. After the center was rebuilt, Baldwin rebuilt anesthesia services by organizing a team of seven anesthesiologists and 10 certified registered nurse anesthetists.

His next project was to lead an \$89 million restoration of Tulane Medical Center's hospital, including reopening its pharmacy, cafeteria and central sterile and operating rooms.

The hospital was operational just one year after the storm.

"I've always been in health care," said Baldwin, who earned a master's degree in health administration from Tulane University. "I started in a clinical EMS role, and I decided to go into management. Health care is one of the professions in which you receive immediate gratification."



Baldwin began his career at Tulane Medical Center nine years ago as an administrative resident. He then moved into various managerial positions before becoming director of the Tulane Cancer Center.

After serving as associate vice president of operations, he became vice president of operations. In both positions, he has directed the operations of physician clinics, clinical

and non-clinical departments and service lines. He also has managed Tulane Medical Center's emergency preparedness team and led the emergency operations committee.

Having already fulfilled numerous positions as a staff member at Tulane Medical Center, Baldwin is looking ahead to his future: He hopes to become CEO of a hospital. •

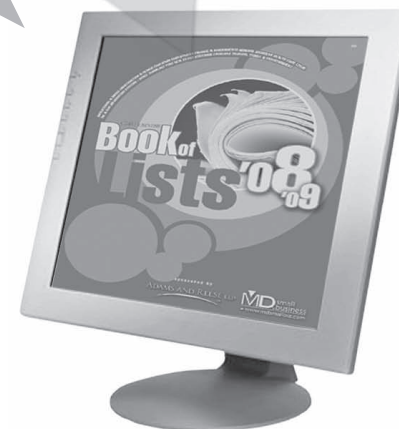
— Amy Ferrara Smith

Like the Book?

You'll love the electronic version!

Use it to:

- hunt for new business
- enhance existing data
- supplement job search
- raise funds
- ...and much more!!!



To order your Electronic Version of the 2008-2009 Book of Lists
contact Monique Brignac
(504) 293-9724 • monique.brignac@nopg.com



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

PROFESSIONAL

Matthew Curole

Position: nutritional services director, Slidell Memorial Hospital

Age: 37

Family: wife, Jamie; children, Elise, 13, Dominic, 11

Education: bachelor's degree in management, Nicholls State University

Some consider making a meal for someone to be an act of love. Matthew Curole, director of nutritional services at Slidell Memorial Hospital, puts his heart into the food he prepares for workers, patients and families.

"It's a simple pleasure of life, and it's so easy to do," Curole said.

Being at a hospital can be stressful for patients and their families, and food can be a source of comfort, Curole said, especially for people in south Louisiana.

"It brightens someone's day just to eat a good meal and enjoy themselves. It's one less thing for families to worry about."

One of Curole's most rewarding moments came from organizing a "Biggest Loser" contest at the hospital to see which staff member could shed the most weight over time.

The competition was initially limited

to Curole's department, where 15 workers lost a combined 185 pounds. Word spread and the administration asked him to take the contest hospitalwide, resulting in 57 employees losing more than 550 pounds. One woman broke down in tears of joy when she saw how much weight she had lost.

"In addition to the impacts we can have on the lives of our patients, I can have an impact on the staff that's working here," Curole said.

Curole also participates in a number of volunteer activities. He is the food chairman and a cook for the Tomato Festival in Chalmette, where he also works with Our Lady of Prompt Succor and helps its school prepare a pancake breakfast with Santa Claus each December. •

— Fritz Esker

PROFESSIONAL

Richard Gaiennie

Position: CEO, Bridge House Corp.

Age: 71

Family: wife, Barbara; children, Bill, 49, Michelle, 41, Dana, 40

Education: studied business at Loyola University

Richard "Buzzy" Gaiennie has witnessed a lot of dramatic transformations in his 25 years in charge of Bridge House. One of his favorite success stories is that of Kevin Gardere, who now heads the major gifts fundraising department at the substance abuse treatment center.

"Because of an automobile accident during his young days, he had a serious leg injury, and he's had to have his leg amputated," Gaiennie said. "He's overcome both alcoholism and an addiction to pain medication. He's doing a great job for us as an employee."

Former residents make up nearly 40 percent of the 55-member staff at Bridge House. Since its inception, the facility has assisted more than 20,000 addicts in their recovery, using 12-step programs and various models of behavioral therapy.

Treatment at the nonprofit center also includes a component called "working recovery." Along with a clinical counselor, each resident is assigned a vocational rehabilitation counselor.

For Gaiennie, a recovering alcoholic who said his work is inspired by a spiritual awakening he experienced when he



photo by Frank Aymami

was three years sober, running Bridge House is more of a vocation than a job.

"The best thing I've ever done with my life is being here at Bridge House, and I'm extremely grateful for having the opportunity."

After a quarter-century at the helm of the center, Gaiennie will celebrate another milestone in October when Bridge House moves from its Camp Street location into a new 35,000-square-foot, 104-bed facility at Earhart Boulevard

and South Dupre Street. Bridge House will use its original building to house a women's residential treatment facility, Grace House.

"Statistics show that a person's recovery is going to be consistent with the stability of their work," Gaiennie said. "We have identified that most of our people are emotionally immature and don't know how to stay employed. So we invest quite a bit in teaching them a work ethic." •

— Sonya Stinson

PROFESSIONAL

Robert Gardner

Position: psychosocial oncology director, Touro Infirmary

Age: 51

Family: wife, Kim; daughter, Paige, 3

Education: bachelor's degree in business and psychology, Auburn University; master's degree in education, University of New Orleans; counselor education graduate, University of New Orleans

Nearly 10 years ago, Robert Gardner lay next to his mother who was dying from cancer. She said to him, "Do something with your life that matters. You'll know what it is when you find it."

The message stuck with Gardner, who had owned a bread bakery in Memphis, Tenn., for 15 years and worked prior to that in the food service industry. After his mother's death, he moved to Jackson, Miss., and began consulting businesses opening bakeries. During that time, Gardner was attending grief counseling.

"My therapist said, 'Have you ever thought about being in my chair? The way you ask questions and talk about everything, you might be a good therapist.'"

It was also the same time Gardner met his wife, Kim. They moved to New Orleans, where Gardner went back to school to become a counselor.

In 2006, cancer hit the homefront again. Kim was diagnosed with cervical cancer, and Gardner was the first to deliver the message.

"I actually told her, and I remember rehearsing in the car exactly how I would break the news to her," Gardner said. "It gave me another level of understanding of how cancer could affect healthy people out of the blue and



photo by Frank Aymami

Dr. Robert Gardner chats with patient Mary Ann Hastings at a Gynecologic Cancer Support Group meeting at Touro Infirmary.

change their lives, and gave me motivation to keep doing what I was doing."

Kim is in remission and almost 100 percent cured.

Since joining Touro's staff as director of psychosocial oncology, Gardner has developed a supportive cancer care program. In addition to counseling patients and their families, he also co-facilitates a weekly support group for caregivers of cancer patients at the American Cancer Society's

Patrick F. Taylor Hope Lodge.

"My role is to help those affected by cancer become better prepared to deal with the psychological, emotional and interpersonal impact of their disease," Gardner said. "Cancer can lead people down a path of hopelessness, and it's my job to be there for them to grasp the mechanisms in their life that can provide them hope."•

— Tommy Santora



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

PROFESSIONAL

Thomas Grimstad

Position: CEO, Louisiana Mutual Medical Insurance Co.

Age: 62

Family: wife, Wina; sons, Thomas Jr., 34, John, 29

Education: bachelor's degree in zoology, University of Wisconsin; doctor of medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine

Under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Grimstad, who became president and CEO of Louisiana Mutual Medical Insurance Co. in January 2008, the company was able to give its Louisiana and Arkansas policyholders a dividend for the second consecutive year.

"The workers are really the ones who deserve the credit," said Grimstad, the fourth physician to lead LAMMICO, an insurance company led by physicians that provides malpractice coverage to doctors and other health care practitioners.

"My ability to do that is because of what has transpired for more than a quarter of a century at the company," he said.

For 18 years before joining LAMMICO, Grimstad worked as a physician of consultative pulmonary disease at West Jefferson Medical Center, where he was chief of staff in 1985.

"I miss seeing patients and the interaction

with patients," he said. "Doctors have a certain opportunity to do good and I miss that."

However, Grimstad said he takes pride in his current work and the company.

His connection with the medical field can be traced back to his youth, when his mother, a physician, worked as an internist with a specialty in dermatology. Grimstad said there were not many women in the medical field at that time in history.

"Her graduating class had three women out of 100 or so students," he said. "She was a pioneer in medicine. She encouraged all of our family to obtain an education."

And this physician-turned-CEO still prides himself on his ability to help others.

"One of my greatest accomplishments is getting to this point where I can help physicians of this state at a broad level."•

— Amy Ferrara Smith

PROFESSIONAL

Geoffrey Nagle

Position: director, Tulane Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health; associate professor of psychiatry, Tulane University School of Medicine

Age: 43

Family: wife, Gabriela; children, Jake, 9, Juliana, seven weeks

Education: bachelor's degree in political science, Duke University; master's degrees in social work and public health and Ph.D. in mental health policy research, Tulane University

Geoffrey Nagle is among a growing group of people who believe treating the social and emotional health of infants and children is the best way to promote productivity and success as they mature, benefiting not only the children, but also their families and society.

Committed to the welfare of the very young, he left a career in the entertainment industry to volunteer for 18 months at hospitals and orphanages in Latin America before coming to New Orleans in 1995.

"I had an impression as an outsider that it was going to be the closest thing I could get to a third-world country in the United States," Nagle said referring to New Orleans. He was also eager to work with two noted experts in mental health care, Dr. Charles Zeanah, who co-founded the Tulane Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health with Nagle, and Joy Osofsky.

As the state coordinator of BrightStart, a comprehensive early childhood initiative administered by the Louisiana Office of Public Health, Nagle has helped develop and implement Quality Start, a child care rating system. Quality Start is augmented by a package of tax credits and incentives that



photo by Frank Aymami

Geoffrey Nagle hosts a puppet show in the Mr. Rogers Castle at the Children's Museum with Reese Kurt, left, and Nico Caputto.

reward quality child care. Nagle said 40 percent of the centers in the state are enrolled in Quality Start.

"The goal is to help all of those centers get to be a quality center, at least three stars or above," within five years. "It's an ambitious goal."

Quality Start infuses medical care, social and emotional health initiatives, early childhood education, family support

and parenting education into its model.

"The notion is that any one of those (alone) isn't going to really change the big picture," said Nagle, adding that real change will take 15 to 20 years if the system is sufficiently implemented. "We'll know when we get there that we're no longer at the bottom."•

— Diana Chandler

PROFESSIONAL

Melba Perez-Berguno

Position: licensed clinical social worker, River Parishes Hospital

Age: 53

Family: husband, Fernando; children, Jonathan, 21, Robert, 18

Education: bachelor's degree in sociology and master's degree in social work, University of Puerto Rico

As a social worker, it's Melba Perez-Berguno's job to help people through difficult times.

Her most memorable case involved a widow who had no family and was suffering from a critical illness. The closest person to the widow was her friend of 30 years, so when the time came to pick someone to make important decisions for the widow, her longtime friend was chosen.

As a social worker, it was Perez-Berguno's job to work as a liaison between the hospital and the court, as well as provide support and education to the friend.

Perez-Berguno often works similar cases where end-of-life issues become complex because the critically ill individual did not specify in writing what his or her wishes were.

"You have to coordinate and facilitate at different levels so the process is correct," she said.

Through it all, Perez-Berguno is acutely aware of the emotional nature of her job and the stress these incidents place on her patients.



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

"It touches us emotionally because it could be one of your family members. It reminds you of issues we all have to deal with sooner or later."

Perez-Berguno's good deeds are not limited to her work at River Parishes Hospital. She tutors students in Spanish at Riverside Academy in Reserve and is an avid American Cancer Society supporter. She is a 12-year survivor of breast

cancer, and her husband is a survivor of tongue and prostate cancer, so the cause is close to her heart and she often serves as a public speaker on battling cancer.

In the end, her work — professional and volunteer — focuses on one thing: making a difference in the lives of others.

"We don't realize how much we impact other people."•

— Fritz Esker

PROFESSIONAL

Mackie Shilstone

Position: executive director, The Fitness Principle at East Jefferson General Hospital

Age: 58

Family: wife, Sandy; children, Scott, 22, Spencer, 17

Education: bachelor's degree in political science and master's degree in business administration with a focus on organizational development, Tulane University; master's degree in nutrition, Goddard College; associate's degree in physical education, Delgado Community College

When Mackie Shilstone joined the Tulane University football team as a walk-on in 1972, he was a 140-pound split end — so small that his college football coach said he'd never be respected as a professional athlete.

"I've had him eat those words 3,000 times. If you listen to what people tell you you can't do, you don't," Shilstone said.

Shilstone is widely known as a health coach to the stars, although he finds it difficult to put himself in one category.

"I'm basically Special Forces. My athletes manage to win with me."

When he slowed down enough for an interview, he'd just left West Palm Beach, Fla., where he was training tennis champ Serena Williams, with whom he's worked with for more than a year.

Shilstone said he never imagined he'd be in the position he's in today, but after his big break in 1985, his fame has skyrocket-

ed. That was when he coached Michael Spinks in his upset of world heavyweight boxing champion Larry Holmes in 15 rounds. Under Shilstone's tutelage, Spinks became the first light heavyweight to win the title.

"When Michael won, it was history and it literally put me on the map worldwide," Shilstone said. "Before I knew it, I became an athlete of athletes."

Shilstone has worked with more than 3,000 athletes during the past 25 years.

"The toughest thing is to take a winner already because you've got so much to lose," he said. "If I do my job, you probably won't notice it because the athletes are going to perform up to what they can do."

Shilstone's clients have included winners and record holders in numerous sports, but he considers his family his greatest achievement yet. •

— Diana Chandler



PROFESSIONAL

Diane Sieta

Position: case management reimbursement supervisor and business and industry liaison, West Jefferson Medical Center

Age: 52

Family: children, Jason, 32, Jamie, 29

Education: L.W. Higgins High School

Diane Sieta may wear different hats at West Jefferson Medical Center, but one thing remains constant: She's calm.

Overseeing the release of patients, Sieta and her division ensure patients have everything they need to continue recovery once they leave the hospital.

"We make sure patients have their transportation, home health and rehabilitation needs arranged so they can make a safe transition home," said Sieta, a 23-year veteran of the hospital.

Sometimes Mother Nature interferes with her day-to-day responsibilities, and that's when Sieta does the work that makes her most proud. When Hurricane Gustav rolled into the Gulf of Mexico, it fell on Sieta and her group to organize the evacuation of 90 patients and arrange for any medical needs that might arise during their airlift from New Orleans.

"When the final call was made to evacuate,

we started looking at what each patient needed and identified all of the potential medical equipment needs of the patients. We copied charts and records for transport, but we were calm and quiet, going about our duties and preparations that many weren't aware what was happening."

After the storm passed, it was Sieta who monitored and arranged the safe return of the patients, frequently calling each of them so they knew they were not forgotten.

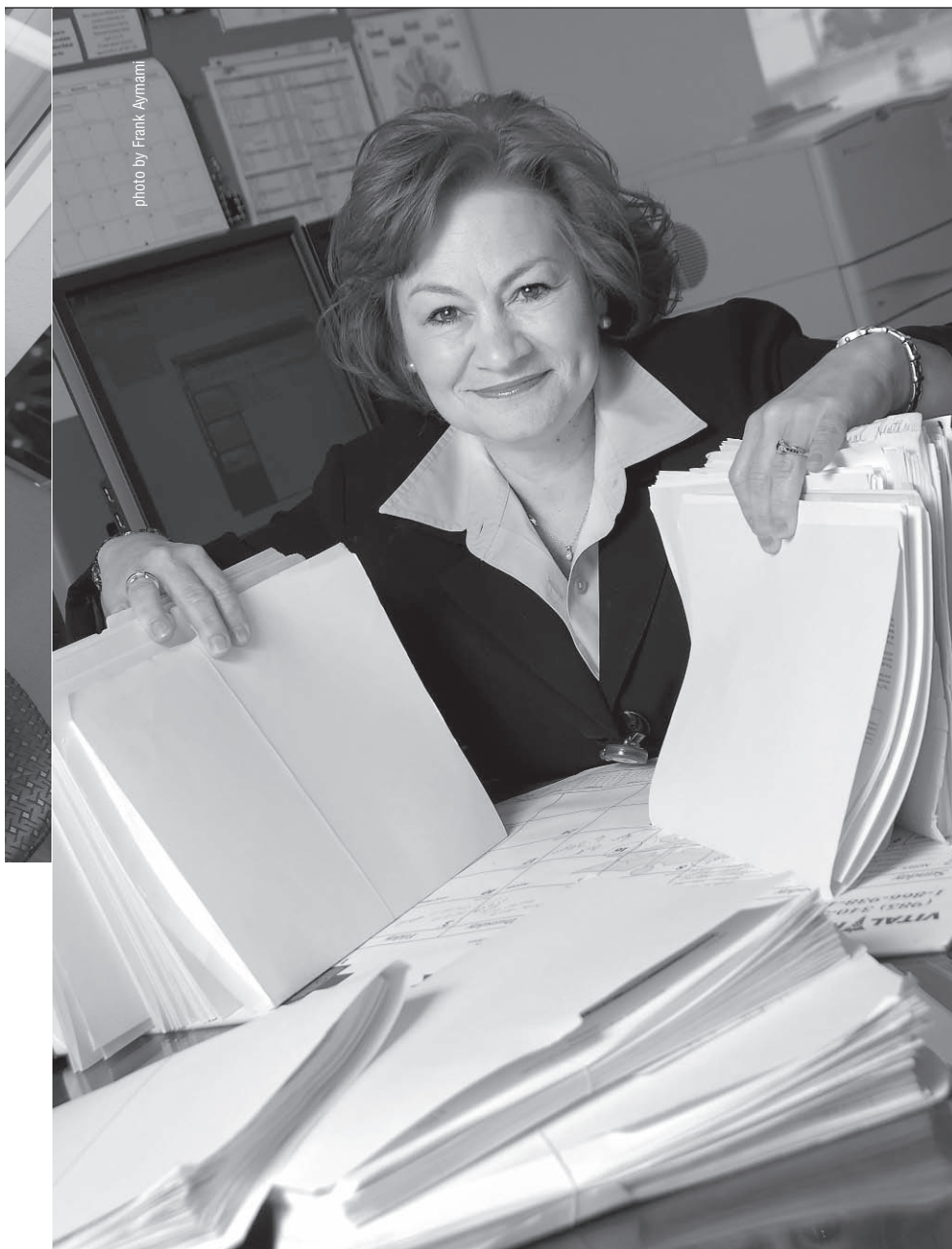
Sieta is proud of how her division rallied during a two-week period to safely return the patients.

"These were members of our community, and we would not stop until we got them home."

She's also proud of her own resilience during the storm.

"I've never been more amazed. Since the hurricanes, I have found in myself things that I never knew I had in me. I would be proud to stay again during the next hurricane." •

— Abby Kral



PROFESSIONAL

Lillian Stiegler

Position: professor, Southeastern Louisiana University Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Age: 50

Family: husband, Bernard; sons, Ben, 28, Joey, 25, Daniel, 22

Education: bachelor's degree in speech language pathology, Nicholls State University; master's degree in communication disorders, Louisiana State University Medical Center; Ph.D., speech language pathology, LSU

Lillian Stiegler recalled a recent conversation with a mother who has brought her autistic child to Southeastern Louisiana University's Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders for 12 years.

"She said, 'I remember that first day when we talked, I felt like you gave me my son back,'" said Stiegler, a professor and specialist in autism spectrum disorders.

After pondering the comment, Stiegler came to understand the mother was talking about the hope she found from the consultation. Stiegler was able to point out the boy's potential to lead a fulfilling life in spite of his diagnosis.

The boy has developed into a person with a terrific sense of humor with a group of friends and a keen interest in girls and movies, she said. Stories such as this are, for Stiegler, "the best part of the job."

One of the worst parts is her frustration at the pull of unfounded "miracle cures" — from removing mercury from the bloodstream to hyperbaric oxygen chambers — on desperate parents, as well as the belief that autism is caused by immunization.

In 2004, the producers of the Lifetime Television movie



Lillian Stiegler reads with Jack Dahl, 3, at Southeastern Louisiana University's speech-language-hearing clinic.

"Miracle Run," which was filmed in New Orleans and based on a true story about a single mother of autistic twin boys, tapped Stiegler's expertise. Her first look at the script told her she had her work cut out for her. For instance, the writers had a scene with the young children comforting their mother when she was crying.

"That's not what you would expect a child with autism to do — certainly not a young child," Stiegler said. "Very often, they have a lot of difficulty reading other people's emotions."

Stiegler recruited parents to help with the project, and they were able to add valuable insight to improve the script. •

— Sonya Stinson

PROFESSIONAL

Debra Thibodeaux

Position: radiation therapy department office manager, West Jefferson Medical Center

Age: 35

Family: daughter, Darion, 11

Education: John Ehret High School

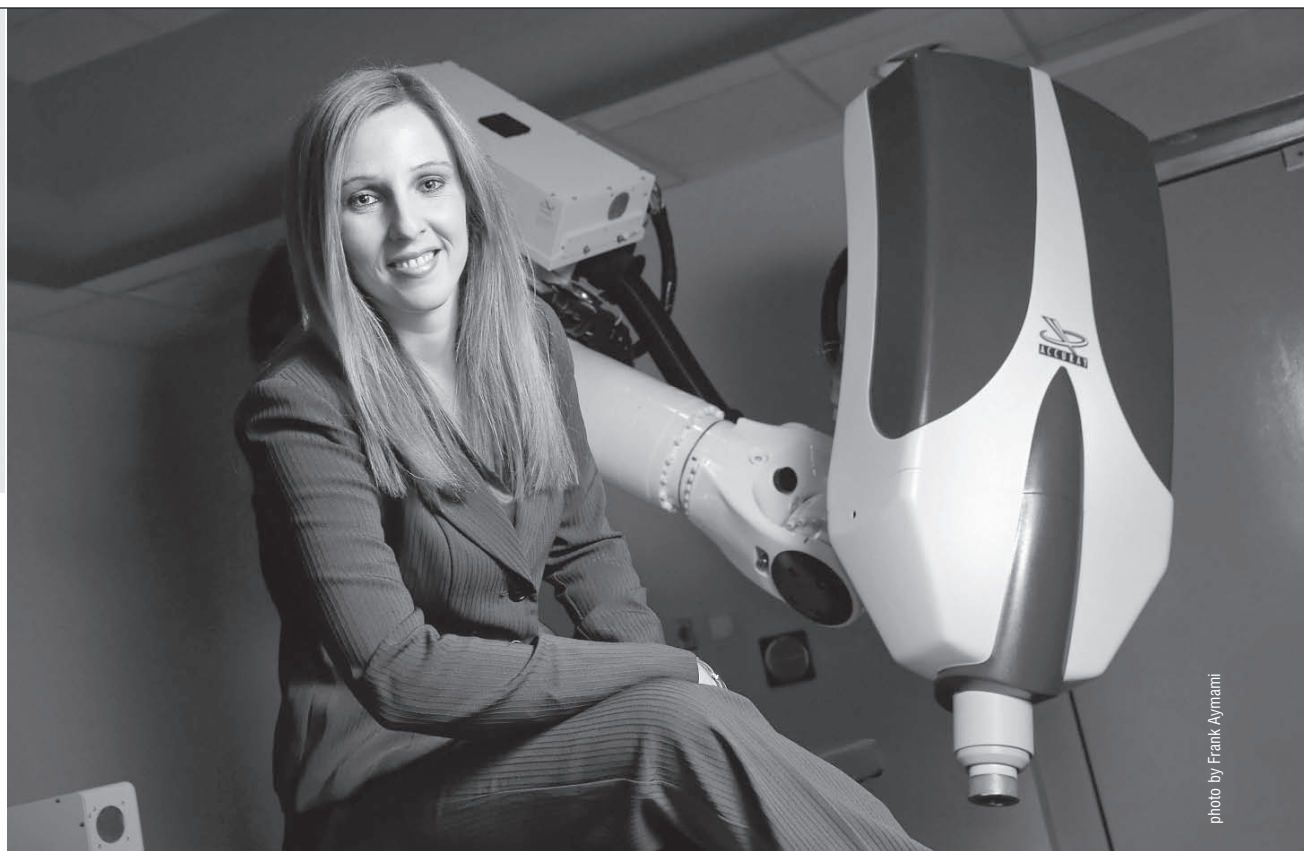
The images of the June flooding in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, looked all too familiar to Debra Thibodeaux.

"It looked like Katrina all over again," she said. "We knew exactly what those people were going through and what they were in need of. I figured we had to find a way to help."

So the radiation therapy department office manager at West Jefferson Medical Center spearheaded efforts throughout the medical complex to help an Iowa hospital recover from the devastation caused by the flooding. As a result, West Jeff raised more than \$1,000 and sent 50 boxes of supplies and personal care items to help employees at Mercy Medical Center.

"It was one of the most gratifying things I have ever done since I have been at West Jeff," she said. "It's rewarding because of what we went through with displacement after Katrina and knowing how people helped us, so it was only right that we give something back."

Thibodeaux is no stranger to organizing fundraisers. She supervises 13 employees and is responsible for organizing events for the department and its patients, including American Cancer Society events such as the West Bank



Relay for Life and an open house for West Jefferson's CyberKnife Center.

She also serves as a member of the hospital's Pink Tea Committee. Each October, the hospital honors breast cancer survivors at a special event. Last year, the event was a luncheon where pink tea was served. In addition to the meal, each guest received a bag filled with goodies and had a chance to win door prizes. Thibodeaux helped plan the event, stuffed

gift bags, garnered donations and served lunch.

"I interact with many patients undergoing cancer treatment and their families and know firsthand the challenges involved, so you have to have an upbeat attitude and be committed to this department and patients," she said. "These patients come to you six to eight weeks at a time and become part of your family, and you have to treat them that way." •

— Tommy Santora



photo by Frank Aymami

PROFESSIONAL

Steve Worley

Position: president and CEO, Children's Hospital

Age: 60

Family: wife, Patty; children, Laura, 39, Cliff, 27; three grandchildren

Education: bachelor's and master's degrees in business, Virginia Commonwealth University

When Steve Worley came to New Orleans to work for Children's Hospital 28 years ago, it was a small-scale rehabilitation clinic for children.

Now, having served as president and CEO for 23 years, the hospital is a nationally recognized pediatric and academic medical center. When he was earning his master's degree in business, Worley had a summer internship in nursing at the Medical College of Virginia. During the internship, something clicked.

"It just grabbed me and I've been doing it ever since," Worley said.

The team atmosphere is something Worley emphasizes when discussing his love for the medical industry.

"You just end up working with a lot of bright, enthusiastic people."

Worley views the hospital's response during Katrina and its subsequent resurrection as the hospital's biggest challenge. There were more than 100 patients in the hospital during Katrina's landfall, and every one of them was successfully evacuated to health care facilities elsewhere. After making

sure the patients were cared for, the challenge was bringing the hospital back to its pre-Katrina status.

More than 600 employees relocated after the storm, and Worley and his staff had to replace them, a feat that has been accomplished. Since then Children's Hospital has exceeded its pre-Katrina capacity, caring for about 60,000 children in a year.

"We're taking care of more children than ever before."

All of this is a testament to how much Worley cares about his adopted city and its residents — he and his wife moved to the city 28 years ago and they haven't left since.

"Our city needs exceptional health care," Worley said. "If you are fortunate enough to achieve the opportunity of working for a successful, high-profile organization that makes a difference in people's lives, has a great reputation and whose sole purpose is doing the right thing, it doesn't take long to realize you should hold on to that opportunity for as long as you can. ... It's been a great run for us."•

— Fritz Esker



DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY
SERVICES OF NEW ORLEANS

Congratulations to our
wonderful Healthcare Heroes
Robert Post, MD
and
Rosa Bustamante-Forest, RN



Your Medical Home!

Ensuring 100% Healthcare Access &
Coverage For All ©



Uptown

3201 S. Carrollton Ave.
New Orleans, LA 70118
(504) 207-3060

Bywater/St. Cecilia

4201 N. Rampart St.
New Orleans, LA 70117
(504) 941-6041

Metairie

111 N. Causeway Blvd.
New Orleans, LA 70002
(504) 482-0084



photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

VOLUNTEER

Viola Cocran

Position: volunteer, Slidell Memorial Hospital

Age: 86

Family: daughters, Suzanne, 55, Debbi, 52, Marlene, 51; five great-grandchildren

Education: Biloxi High School alumna

Slidell was just a city of dirt roads when Viola Cocran moved there, and Slidell Memorial Hospital was still a concept waiting to be built.

"I was just going there helping wherever they needed me," mostly in administration," Cocran said.

She recalls the days in 1959 when the hospital staff met at City Hall to prepare for the new facility. She's logged 38,000 volunteer hours at the hospital since then.

Cocran typically starts her day at 6:30 a.m., ahead of many others. "Good morning, Miss Viola," workers greet her as they arrive.

"That's what they call me. 'Hey, Miss Viola,' they'll holler at me. It's very rewarding to volunteer. I'm not a nurse, but I can run errands for them."

She types, files, binds, faxes, staples, confirms meetings, makes phone calls, receives guests and attends special events. One of her daughters drives her to work.

During the past 50 years, she's worked in several areas of the hospital, including patient care.

"Somebody may need some water. I used to do that, just to make them feel happy and that somebody cares for them. People get so bored."

Cocran said she's volunteered for so long, she can't remember the names of the people she's helped over the years. But she enjoys reading the many letters of thanks she's received.

"They make me feel so wonderful, you know."

At 86, Cocran said she's rarely been sick. In April, she was dreading an eye operation that promised to sideline her for a day.

"I hate staying home. I love to be with people. I've been so healthy, but with the old age, getting old, everything starts to happen."•

— Diana Chandler

VOLUNTEER

Christine Dittmann

Position: volunteer, Touro Infirmary

Age: 42

Family: husband, Steven; son, Drake, 11

Education: bachelor's degree in journalism, Michigan State University



photo by Frank Aymami

Christine Dittmann wants cancer patients to know it's no longer the death sentence it used to be.

She's living proof.

Dittmann, a four-year ovarian cancer survivor, has undergone 45 chemotherapy treatments and three surgeries in the past four years. She is doing maintenance chemotherapy three times a month for the rest of her life to survive a disease with no cure.

"Cancer is not the death sentence it once was," she said. "You can fight it with support from your family and friends, and 99 percent of it is about attitude."

Dittmann has been using her firsthand experience to help other women cancer patients by volunteering for the past two years at Touro Infirmary. She is the co-facilitator for the hospital's monthly gynecologic cancer support group and has worked with Dr. Robert Gardner, the hospital's director of psychosocial oncology and her gynecologic oncologist, to create a newsletter for women with gynecologic cancer.

GIRL (Gaining Insight into Real Living) Talk debuted in December, and in it Dittmann shared her story and a poem she authored, "Glory, Glory," which was published nationally in the May/June 2008 Coping with Cancer magazine.

Dittmann also contributes to the gynecologic oncology newsletter for Woman's Hospital in Baton Rouge and is working with the Ovarian Cancer National Alliance to start a training program called Survivors Teaching Students for medical and nursing students in Louisiana. The program lets ovarian cancer survivors tell their stories to students in the hopes more women will be diagnosed earlier. Once

implemented, Dittmann will be trained to go to the medical schools to share her story.

Before being diagnosed with ovarian cancer, Dittmann had a 20-year career in health care marketing for various hospitals in Louisiana, a background, she said, that has helped her with her volunteer work.

"It just felt like it was a natural calling for me to help others," she said. "With my background, I could help other patients cope with what they were going through and give them hope."•

— Tommy Santora

VOLUNTEER

Betty Dugas

Position: auxiliary member, West Jefferson Medical Center

Age: 79

Family: sons, Mirtile, 59, Jay, 45

Education: L.H. Marrero High School

At the age of 79, Betty Dugas is one of West Jefferson Medical Center's most dedicated auxiliary volunteers, clocking in three days a week to assist the medical staff.

"It's very rewarding," said Dugas, who started volunteering at the hospital 22 years ago. "It gives me something to do instead of staying home."

After retiring from a 28-year career with the Jefferson Parish Clerk of Court and experiencing the death of her husband and a son, Dugas decided she "had to find something to do."

A friend encouraged her to volunteer at West Jefferson Medical Center, a place Dugas remembered since high school as a sanctuary for her ill relatives. Through the past two decades, Dugas has volunteered more than 24,000 hours.

Many of those hours involved work with the WJMC Auxiliary's Junior Volunteer Program, a hospital service group comprised of teenagers who share an interest in health care careers.

Dugas made certain that each young volunteer received an obligatory orientation before their summer work, and she worked hard to match each teen's assignment preference with the appropriate hospital department. At the end of the



photo by Frank Aymami

program, Dugas also volunteered to oversee the planning and execution of the Junior Volunteer Recognition Program.

Along with many of the hospital's employees and a group of her Auxiliary peers, Dugas found herself on duty during Hurricane Katrina and the storm's aftermath. For more than a week, she remained at the hospital, beginning her day at 6

a.m. without knowing the day's assignments.

While she is called upon to help with many different tasks, Dugas said one of her duties is to inform others about the hospital's services.

"I love to give information," she said. •

— Amy Ferrara Smith

VOLUNTEER

Joseph Heintz

Position: Spanish teacher, East Jefferson General Hospital

Age: 85

Family: single

Education: bachelor's degree in French and English, Tulane University; doctor of the University, philosophy, University of Paris

When retiree Fritz Heintz showed up at East Jefferson General Hospital a couple of years ago to volunteer, he expected to be put to work in the gift shop. A friend who sent him there told him they needed a man to help lift big packages, Heintz said.

But once the volunteer services supervisor checked Heintz's resume and saw he had extensive experience as a language teacher, he was assigned instead to teach Spanish to staff members needing to communicate with the area's growing post-Katrina Hispanic population.

Heintz's students include therapists, nurses and other volunteers who work at the hospital's Wellness Center. He teaches basic Spanish, intermediate medical Spanish and intermediate nonmedical Spanish, conducting four classes twice a week.

Heintz has taught Spanish and French at every level from elementary school to college. Immediately before his retirement in 1985, he did a 10-year stint at St. Benilde Catholic School in Metairie, where he discovered he enjoyed working with students at the grammar school level.

"That's the place where you can really teach those kids

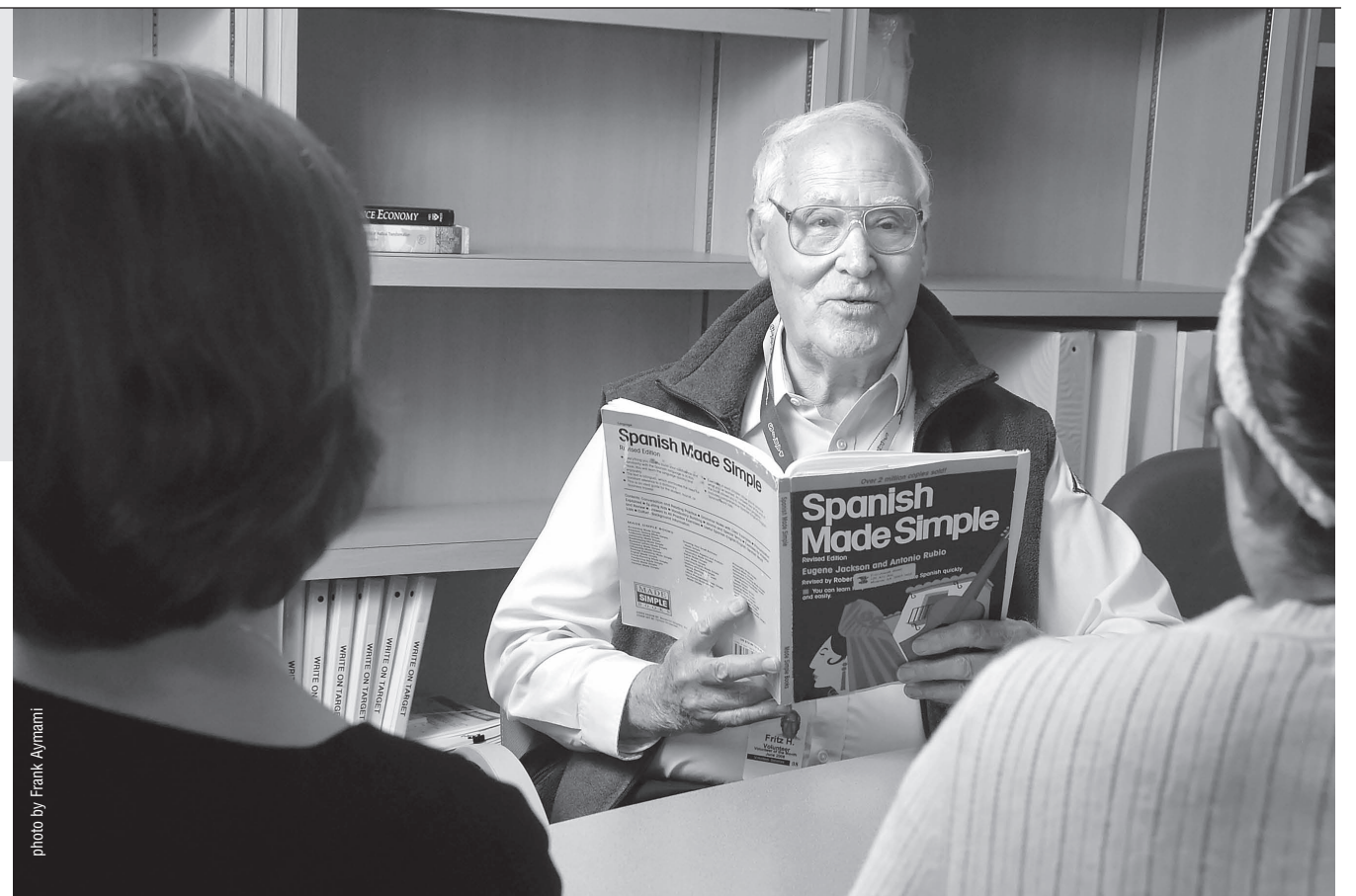


photo by Frank Aymami

and influence them," he said.

A former Navy officer, Heintz indulged his wanderlust for many years after retiring from the military. His travels took him to France, where he studied philosophy at the University of Paris; Osaka, Japan, where he taught philosophy to military personnel and gave English lessons to the Japanese; and Mexico and Spain, where he took universi-

ty courses in Spanish.

At EJGH, Heintz has learned to be flexible when his students' workload sometimes prevents them from keeping up with their Spanish lessons as much as they would like.

"My students are wonderful to me. I hope I am making a difference in their lives and in the hospital." •

— Sonya Stinson

VOLUNTEER

Walter Melan

Position: volunteer, Touro Infirmary

Age: 86

Family: wife, Betty; children, Bryan, 53, Melissa, 51; stepdaughters, Lisa, 43, Pamela, 36, Janine, 32

Education: graduated from Samuel J. Peters High School

Walter Melan takes pride in helping people navigate Touro Infirmary as a volunteer attendant at the Delachaise Information Desk, stationed on the walkway between the Buchman Building and the hospital.

“I’m not as grumpy looking like some people. I try to be friendly and talk to people,” Melan said.

But what truly separates the 86-year-old from others is a commitment to spend four hours at the hospital most weekdays beginning at 7:15 a.m.

“Sometimes I’ll have two, three or four people come in looking for directions. You don’t want to run them all around the hospital,” he said. “I try to give them the shortest and straightest way to where they want to go.”

Melan began volunteering at Touro in 1992, about a year after the death of his first wife, Althea, a dialysis patient there

from 1979-91. Melan retired from the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad in 1982 and had made many friends at the hospital over the years. Volunteering seemed a natural thing to do, he said, since he was accustomed to waking up at 4 a.m.

As it turned out, he found plenty to occupy his time at Touro, including his current wife, Betty, whom he met in the cafeteria and married in 1995.

“We started going out. ... We decided to get married. We were interested in most of the same things.”

And even though he was hospitalized three times last year with cardiovascular problems, he intends to continue volunteering as long as his health permits.

“I’m feeling all right. As long as I’m able, I’m gonna keep coming here,” he said. “I’d rather be up here where they got people. I can talk to people.”•

— Diana Chandler

Walter Melan provides directions to Colleen DeFraités at the Delachaise Desk at Touro Infirmary.



VOLUNTEER

Mattie Schouest

Position: Auxiliary member and craft committee chairwoman, West Jefferson Medical Center

Age: 81

Family: children, Marian, 46, Herbert Jr., 51, Georgette, 47; three grandchildren

Education: Ponchatoula High School alumna

In 1977, when her three children left home, Mattie Schouest wanted to start a new chapter in her life. She chose to go to West Jefferson Medical Center to help her community.

“I needed to find something to occupy my mind and my time,” Schouest said. “Volunteering with the Auxiliary gave me another outlook for my life. I got to be involved with other people, and I made some marvelous friends. They gave a purpose to my life, and I hope I brought some good spirit and efforts to the hospital.”

What may have started as a refuge and release from everyday life turned out to be anything but temporary; 33 years later, Schouest is still a member of the hospital’s Auxiliary.

“I don’t go as often as I would like because it can be hard for me to get around, but I plan to try and go once a month to check-in and visit with my friends,” Schouest said.

Without sounding boastful, Schouest speaks fondly of all of her accomplishments since joining the Auxiliary.

She and other volunteers started a craft club in 1979 that did not have a specific area in the hospital where they



could work. So she opened her home and invited the other volunteers.

“We would drink tea, have lunch and talk while we made crafts to help raise money,” she said. “We also held bazaars and sponsored other events to support different projects.”

Schouest is quick to talk about her grandson, who is grad-

uating from Tulane University in May with a master’s degree in public health.

“I like to brag about it,” she said. “I am hopeful that he will start medical school.”

“I hope I had some influence on his choices.”•

— Abby Kral

Honoring the Heroes

Nearly 300 people attended the 2009 Health Care Heroes reception May 14 at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Medallions were presented to the 55 honorees upon arriving and CityBusiness Publisher Mark Singletary recognized each honoree later in the evening. These photos and more can be seen on the CityBusiness photo gallery at www.neworleanscitybusiness.com.

Photos by Frank Aymami



Honoree Rosa Bustamante-Forest with husband, Larry.



Dana Kelley, left, with mother and honoree Cheryl Carter.



Honoree Dan Russo, left, and Brian Landry.



Honoree Dianne Lauve with husband, Russell.



From left: Honorees Mattie Schouest, Diane Sieta, Darlene Gondrella and Betty Dugas.



Mercedes Benz representatives Harry Anderson, left, Christopher Stuben and Leo Flotron.



Honoree Geoff Nagle and wife, Gabriela.



Honorees Stephen Baldwin, left, and Dr. Richard Gardner.



From left: BCI representatives Tom Russo, Steve Russo, Linda Moya and Michael Minix.



Honoree Frank DellaCroce and wife, Janet.



Glen Golemi, left, and Pat Quinlan.



Honoree Viola Cocran, center, with daughters, Suzanne Mabie, left, and Debbie Cocran.



Honoree Dr. Glenn Casey, left, and A.J. Vallon.



Honoree Chris Fabacher and wife, Pat.



Front row, from left: Sue Pitoscia, honorees Kim Haley and Robert Gardner, and Michael Sniffen. Back row: Dale Mertens and honorees Paula Harrelson, Dr. Michele Cooper and Dianna Lauve.



Dr. Michele Cooper with husband and honoree Dr. Scott Sullivan.



Clockwise from left: Glazer's representatives Eric Myers, John Ruffin, Lee Thomas, Michael Brewer, Lisa Nguyen and Sharon Floyd.



Kimberly Shelton, left, and honoree Debra Thibodeaux.



From left: Michael Griffin, Jennifer Magee and honoree Dr. Robert Post.



Danita Sullivan, left, and honoree Kathy Steiner.

New Orleans
CITYBUSINESS

2009 HEALTH CARE HEROES

s p o n s o r e d b y :

Maker's S^{IV} Mark[®]



**THE GLAZER'S COMPANIES OF LOUISIANA IS THE PROUD
DISTRIBUTOR FOR MAKER'S MARK IN LOUISIANA!**

At Maker's Mark we embrace a rich tradition of bourbon making that spans six generations. In fact, we're so proud of our family that we've developed a heritage team to travel the world educating folks on the finer points of Maker's Mark Bourbon and bourbon in general.

Wireless | Networking | Security | Storage | VoIP | Maintenance | Cabling

The South's technology productivity efficiency profitability company.

When you hire BCI, you're hiring more than a technology company. You're hiring a partner committed to your organization's overall success. By providing practical, business-savvy technology solutions, we've helped more than 3,000 clients throughout the South to grow and succeed. And we can do the same for you. Find out how. Call BCI Today.



BCI

Business Communications, Inc.

Technology makes it possible. Our people make it happen.

Jackson | Gulfport | New Orleans | Little Rock | Birmingham | Memphis | Mobile | Shreveport

Call **504.731.1991** or visit us online at www.bcianswers.com.